



Silverdale Baptist

RUTH: BEAUTY FROM ASHES ~ WHEN LIFE TURNS TO ASHES
RUTH 1:1-5 ~ 05/27-28/2023

Getting Started

Sometimes life doesn't go the way we planned or hoped. We all have goals or dreams. But, sometimes, the unexpected happens, and our dreams or plans are over.

When have your dreams or plans fallen apart and left you devastated?

The book of Ruth tells the story of a family, just like ours, whose life and dreams are left in ashes. How did their story go from hope to ashes? Let's begin our study of Ruth.

Learn

The first paragraph of Ruth sets the context for the rest of the story.

|HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 2:1-5.

What is the context for the story of Ruth?

Difficult Circumstances.

1. Living in a nation that has forsaken God.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JUDGES 21:25.

Describe the culture in the time of Ruth and the Judges.

So, what does this mean for the spiritual condition of the people?

How is this similar to or different from our culture today?

2. Living in a time of economic famine.

What was the economic condition of Israel, specifically the land of Judah?

Compromising choices.

1. A choice to leave the promised land.

Famines force us to make hard choices. What did Elimelech choose?

What choice do you think Elimelech should have made?

2. A choice to stay in a polluted land.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 108:8-9. `

How is Moab described?

In Numbers 22-25, the people of Israel camped on the plains of Moab. The king of Moab hired the prophet Balaam to curse God's people. Soon the men of Israel were worshipping the gods of Moab and having sexual relations with the Moabite women. God cursed Moab, and the people of Israel were forbidden to intermarry with the Moabites.

Devastating Consequences.

1. The death of a spouse.
2. The marriage to pagans.
3. The loss of children.

Sum up the first seven verses of Ruth 1. What is the context for the rest of this story?

Apply

Can you identify with the story of Elimelech and Naomi? Have you seen your world burn down around you? What do we do when our circumstances turn against us or when our own

decisions have created devastating consequences? Pastor Tony showed us some application points from verses 6-7.

Making deliberate changes.

1. Believe That God Is Still Faithful
2. You Must Return Back To The Lord

Do you believe God is still faithful? If not, why not?

Will you surrender your situation to God and trust Him to work in your circumstances?

Are you willing to look honestly at your circumstances and make deliberate God-centered changes?

What changes do you need to make?

What changes will you make this week?

Pray

Father, some of us are struggling with life right now. Give us the faith to trust You with our circumstances and our mistakes. Like Elimelech, we too often try to fix our trouble without You. That always lands us in trouble. Please help us surrender our situation to You and trust You to bring beauty from ashes. In the beautiful name of Jesus, we ask, amen.

Dig Deeper

You Can't Run Away

(In which a family makes a bad decision and exchanges one famine for three funerals)

“The efforts which we make to escape from our destiny only serve to lead us into it.”

The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that in his book *The Conduct of Life*, and it's just as true today as when the book was published back in 1860. Because God gave us freedom of choice, we can ignore the will of God, argue with it, disobey it, even fight against it. But in the end, the will of God shall prevail; because “the counsel of the Lord stands forever” (Ps. 33:11) and “He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan. 4:35, NKJV).

The patriarch Job asked, “Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?” (Job 9:4, NKJV) Job knew the answer and so do we: *nobody*. If we obey God's will, everything in life holds together; but if we disobey, everything starts to fall apart. Nowhere in the Bible is this truth better illustrated than in the experiences of Elimelech and his wife Naomi.

We see in this chapter three mistakes that we must avoid as we deal with the problems and trials of life.

1. Unbelief: trying to run from our problems (Ruth 1:1–5)

The time. Life was not easy in those days; for during the period of the Judges, “there was no king in Israel; but every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Jdg. 17:6; and see 18:11; 19:1; 21:25). The Book of Judges is the story of Israel at one of its lowest points in history and is a record of division, cruelty, apostasy, civil war, and national disgrace. Spiritually speaking, we are living *today* in the Book of Judges; for there is no king in Israel, and there will not be until Jesus returns. Like Israel in the past, many of God’s people today are living in unbelief and disobedience and are not enjoying the blessings of God.

It seems incredible that this beautiful love story should take place at such a calamitous period in the nation’s history, but is this not true today? Today we experience national and international perplexities, moral decay, and difficulties of every kind, and yet God loves this lost world and is seeking for a bride. In spite of alarms in the headlines and dangers on the streets, we can be sure that God still loves the world and wants to save lost sinners. When you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, no matter how tough the times may be, you are part of a beautiful love story.

But the Book of Ruth is a *harvest* story as well as a *love* story. During this dark time in Israel’s history, God was seeking a bride and *reaping a harvest*. To be sure, Israel was reaping the harvest of their disobedience (Gal. 6:7); but God was producing the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of Ruth and Naomi. Today, the Lord is seeking a harvest and calls us to share in His labors (John 4:34–48). The harvest today is white and ready, but the laborers are still few (Luke 10:2).

The place. How strange that there should be a famine in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread”! In the Old Testament, a famine was often an evidence of God’s discipline because His people had sinned against Him (Lev. 26:18–20; Deut. 28:15, 23–24). During the time of the Judges, Israel repeatedly turned from God and worshiped the idols of the heathen nations around them; and God had to discipline them (Jdg. 2:10–19). The godly had to suffer because of the ungodly, even in Bethlehem.

The decision. When trouble comes to our lives, we can do one of three things: endure it, escape it, or enlist it. If we only endure our trials, then trials become our master, and we have a tendency to become hard and bitter. If we try to escape our trials, then we will probably miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. But if we learn to enlist our trials, they will become our servants instead of our masters and work for us; and God will work all things together for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28).

Elimelech made the wrong decision when he decided to leave home. What made this decision so wrong?

He walked by sight and not by faith. Abraham made the same mistake when he encountered a famine in the land of promise (Gen. 12:10ff). Instead of waiting for God to tell him what to do next, he fled to Egypt and got into trouble. No matter how difficult our circumstances may be, the safest and best place is in the will of God. It’s easy to say with David, “O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (Ps. 55:6). But it’s wiser to claim the promise of Isaiah 40:31 and wait on the Lord for “wings like eagles” and by faith soar above the storms of life. *You can’t run away from your problems.*

How do you walk by faith? By claiming the promises of God and obeying the Word of God, in spite of what you see, how you feel, or what may happen. It means committing yourself to the Lord and relying wholly on Him to meet the need. When we live by faith, it glorifies God, witnesses to a lost world, and builds Christian character into our lives. God has ordained that “the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; 2 Cor. 5:7); and when we refuse to trust Him, we are calling God a liar and dishonoring Him.

There is a wisdom of this world that leads to folly and sorrow, and there is a wisdom from God that seems folly to the world but that leads to blessing (1 Cor. 3:18–20; James 3:13–18). “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa. 5:21, KJV)

He majored on the physical and not the spiritual. A husband and father certainly wants to provide for his wife and family, but he must not do it at the expense of losing the blessing of God. When Satan met Jesus in the wilderness, his first temptation was to suggest that Christ satisfy His hunger rather than please His Father (Matt. 4:1–4; see John 4:34). One of the devil’s pet lies is: “You do have to live!” But it is *in God* that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, NIV); and He is able to take care of us.

David’s witness is worth considering: “I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread” (Ps. 37:25, NKJV). As Paul faced a threatening future, he testified, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself” (Acts 20:24, KJV). In times of difficulty, if we die to self and put God’s will first (Matt. 6:33), we can be sure that He will either take us out of the trouble or bring us through.

He honored the enemy and not the Lord. By going fifty miles to the neighboring land of Moab, Elimelech and his family abandoned God’s land and God’s people for the land and people of the enemy. The Moabites were descendants of Lot from his incestuous union with his firstborn daughter (Gen. 19:30–38), and they were the Jews’ enemies because of the way they had treated Israel during their pilgrim journey from Egypt to Canaan (Deut. 23:3–6; Num. 22–25). During the time of the Judges, Moab had invaded Israel and ruled over the people for eighteen years (Jdg. 3:12–14); so why should Elimelech turn to them for help? They were a proud people (Isa. 16:6) whom God disdained. “Moab is My washpot,” said the Lord (Ps. 60:8, KJV), a picture of a humiliated nation washing the feet of the conquering soldiers.

The consequences. The name Elimelech means “my God is king.” But the Lord was *not* king in Elimelech’s life, for he left God completely out of his decisions. He made a decision out of God’s will when he went to Moab, and this led to another bad decision when his two sons married women of Moab. Mahlon married Ruth (Ruth 4:10), and Chilion married Orpah. Jews were forbidden to marry Gentile women, especially those from Ammon and Moab (Deut. 7:1–11; 23:3–6; Neh. 13:1–3; Ezra 9:1–4). It was the Moabite women in Moses’ day who seduced the Jewish men into immorality and idolatry; and as a result, 24,000 people died (Num. 25).

Elimelech and his family had fled Judah to escape death, *but the three men met death just the same.* The family had planned only to “sojourn” temporarily in Moab, but they remained for ten years (Ruth 1:4). At the end of that decade of disobedience, all that remained were three lonely widows and three Jewish graves in a heathen land. Everything else was gone (v. 21). Such is the sad consequence of unbelief.

We can’t run away from our problems. We can’t avoid taking with us the basic cause of most of our problems, which is an unbelieving and disobedient heart. “The majority of us begin with the bigger problems outside and forget the one inside,” wrote Oswald Chambers. “A man has to learn ‘the plague of his own heart’ before his own problems can be solved ...” (*The Shadow of an Agony*, p. 76).¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*Be Committed*](#), “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 12–17.