

Ordinary People, Extraordinary God

A study of the book of Ruth

Part 2: Running on empty- Ruth 1:8-22

Tonight, we continue to study the Old Testament book of Ruth. As we truly begin to dive into this ordinary story, we'll notice the hardships of life and how people respond to them.

Perhaps, we'll see our own lives reflected in the lives of the heroes of our faith.

1. Not an easy life!

- In our day of plenty, of supermarkets, grocery stores, & food delivery services, it's hard for us to relate to famine.
- It's very likely that none of us has ever truly experienced starvation or malnutrition.
- However, in ancient times, things like drought or pests could damage or destroy crops. If you couldn't grow it, and stores dwindled, you'd have nothing to eat.
- We heard last week that there was famine in Bethlehem. Do you know what Bethlehem means? House of bread.
- Often, in the Old Testament, famine is a judgment sent by God as discipline because His people had rebelled against Him.
- As we noted last week, Israel had been in a sad cycle of disobedience and rebellion, which then turned to repentance, where God would send them a judge & defender to rescue them. Only later to fall away and repeat their folly.
- We also learned last time that Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was a widow. Ten years later, her sons, Mahlon and Kilion (Chilion), both passed away.
- We are not told why they died. Jewish tradition states that they died for marrying Moabite women, as a form of divine judgment. *"They married Moabite women..."*
- The Moabites' territory was around 50 miles from Bethlehem. The Moabites were the descendants of Lot and his incestuous relationship with his daughter in **Gen. 19:30-38**. They were the enemies of the Jews and mistreated them in the Exodus.
- They also attacked and ruled Israel during the time
- of the judges (**Judges 3:12-14**) for eighteen years.
- Elimelech's name means, *"my God is King"*.

2. When troubles come

- We have one of three options when life isn't easy.
- Endure it- when we do this, we are ceding authority to those trials. They rule and take control of us. Often, this is where worry, fear, anxiety, and depression take root. We aren't called to endure troubles woefully, *"Woe is me!"*

- Instead, patiently endure. **Rom. 5:3-4**; *“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”*
- **Escape** it- we might delay the outcome, but God is an excellent teacher.
- You’ve heard it said, *“You can run, but you cannot hide from your problems.”*
- While instinctively, we know this to be true, we often run away and hide.
- Elimelech had decided that his salvation would come by his hands and moved to Moab. His sons followed with another poor decision to marry Moabite women.
- **Engage** it- we will mature through them; they serve as a forge to help us grow.
- We act on faith. Faith is not based on what we see, but on what is unseen.
- **2 Cor. 5:7**; *“We live (walk) by faith, not by sight.”*
- *How do we walk or live by faith when we see no way out?*
- We **stand** on the promises of God. We **obey** His Word. We **rely** on the Lord’s will.
- We pray **expectantly**. We wait **patiently**. Meanwhile, we work **fervently**.
- **James 1:2-4**; *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*
- Naomi hears that God had provided back in Israel.
- **Vs. 6-7**; *“When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.”*
- Naomi’s return was right, but it seems her desire was still based on food and not fellowship with God. She is bitter, depressed, and feels forsaken.
- Why didn’t Naomi want her two daughters-in-law to go with her? Why would someone who has experienced hurt and pain, someone who already felt alone, want to be even more alone?
- **Vs. 8-9**; *“Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.”*
- Ostensibly, it was for their good, their future remarriage, and personal care.
- If Naomi were truly following the Lord, she would’ve wanted Orpah and Ruth to be in the Promised Land with her, where they could find new husbands if the Lord willed. Instead, she encouraged them to return to a land of idol worship.
- Bringing back two Moabite widows to Israel would’ve been proof of her family’s lack of faith in God and His provision. Perhaps she was worried about judgment?

- If she returns alone, no one will see evidence of her sin. ***She wants to cover up.***
- Naomi is also a woman who has lost hope. Her happiness is only tied to her outward condition. She saw her/their future only through the lens of marriage.
- ***Vs. 12-13; "Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me, even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!" Woe is me!***
- In Naomi's heart, it is God who is to blame for her misfortune and loss.
- She is correct only on one front: ***God is orchestrating*** the events of Naomi and Ruth's lives in a way more amazing than either of them could ever imagine.
- Orpah leaves and fades from the story while Ruth clings to Naomi. Though she had good intentions initially, she returned to her old way of life. ***She gives up.***
- ***Vs. 16-18; "But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her."*** In this moment, the Moabitess is godlier than the daughter of Israel.
- With her sworn oath, ***Ruth is standing up*** for her mother-in-law. She also makes a statement of faith: ***"Your people will be my people and your God my God."*** She not only takes on the care of Naomi but takes Israel as her people group and Yahweh as her God. She is forsaking her old life, her old friendships, and her old worship.
- However, we get one final picture of Naomi and the bitterness that has taken root in her heart in **verses 19-21**.
- ***Vs. 19-21; "So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" "Don't call me Naomi, " she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." Mara means bitter.***
- **Verse 22** sets up the next section of the story, giving us the time of year in Israel, and setting the stage for God's provision for the two women.
- ***Vs. 22; "So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning."***