Some further thoughts on Naomi, Ruth, and God’s care for His people, in the midst of trying times . . .

The book of Ruth begins in the midst of tremendous upheaval in society. Everything seems up for grabs. Even the closing line of the Book of Judges sums it up perfectly, *“everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”* That’s simply the dominant worldview of today’s relativism presented in Old Testament times. Not much has changed in 3000 years. In the midst of immorality, political corruption, violence, lawlessness, and terror, many turn away from God. Yet amongst these tragic circumstances God weaves together a “love story.” Its a story of hope, faith and vision for how He will bring Himself the ultimate glory, and our greatest good.

Let’s review the great grand purposes of God as He’s revealed them to us in Scripture:

**1)** To Exalt His Name to the Highest Place

**2)** To lay low the Pride of man

**3)** To Redeem His Own People to Himself. In the Book of Ruth, we see these themes, especially the theme of Redemption. The other guiding principle in reading an Old Testament story like Ruth comes from asking this key question, *“Where is Jesus? How does this story point to Jesus??”* Obviously we know Jesus isn’t even born until the New Testament times, some 1300 years after Ruth. Still, within this story, Jesus is clearly foreshadowed. Can you discover out how??

Some of the “mess” of our lives comes to us because of forces/ events beyond our control. Bethlehem faced a severe famine, either by lack of rain, or enemy armies. Is God in control of even those events, natural disasters that hurt many? How is He working these events in my life to His glory, and my good?

Other “messes” we make for ourselves –our sins, our foolish decisions and choices. As much as we don’t want to admit to it, want to blame someone else, many times the reason we’re suffering is because of bad choices and behaviors. Elimelech chose to move his family from Bethlehem to Moab. I can only imagine how desperate I would feel if I’m starving, and it seems like God isn’t providing for my family. Is this a wise move? Is it a compromise of his faith? How could one bad choice multiply out to hurt many others in your family, your friends, community and your church? Praying through that question prior to a rash decision could make a huge difference in the lives of many around you.

But God’s plan is not thwarted. He will gain His glory and accomplish His redemptive plan despite my foolish mistakes, even my sins of disobedience. Consequences are tough though. Elimelech and his two sons die in Moab. Naomi is left “holding the bag” so to say, with deep grief contributing to her resentment, and bitterness, inner strife, and further sorrow.

Weeds are everywhere. The little ones seem harmless, but left alone and unattended, they grow and cause further trouble -- an ugly sight to see, and a ruined lawn as well. Weeds creep into our lives too. Weeds of anger, rooted deep in the soil of unmet expectations can cause a huge amount of trouble, even affecting others around us. Resentment, usually an inner, repressed feeling of disappointment with someone else, can quickly morph into bitterness. ***Hebrews 12:15*** commands this: *“see to it that . . . no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”* You may feel totally justified in how you feel. People have hurt you, let you down. It may even seem that God has let you down. Still, how do you “nip that weed of bitterness in the bud?”

1. Acknowledge that God is in control of this event, these emotions. He knows and sees all that’s happened and will deal with it in His perfect justice – at the cross, or at the judgment seat; all wrongs will be righted.
2. Pray for a heart to love your transgressor (the person who did this to you). *“Overcome evil with good”* ***Romans 12:21****.*
3. *“Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you”* ***Col 3:13*** Nipping your bitterness in the bud starts with your realization that my sin, forgiven by Jesus’ death, is greater than any sin anyone could ever do to me

Ruth (and Orpah) have a decisive conversation with Naomi in v6-18. Its oozing with lots of emotion. Naomi’s logic is perfect, spot-on --“Why go with me? It’s a path to destruction, shame, and uncertainty – I surely can’t provide you with a husband, much less assurance of a meager meal.” Yet Ruth’s faith is new, fresh, resilient – apparently based on how she saw Naomi handle rough times. Ruth’s ready to set off into the uncertain unknown because YHWH (God) has changed her so radically that to go back to her former land and people would be turning her back on God.

Could it be your best witness is how you deal with disappointments, fears, and sorrow?

Naomi, though bitter and hopeless at this point, does not deny God’s existence. She’s a wonderful testimony of God using events beyond our control to win others to Himself and gain Him great glory. Naomi calls Him “the Almighty, *El Shaddai*.” She calls herself *Mara*, “bitter.” Yet God isn’t through with Naomi yet. Its barley harvesting time, and the great God Almighty has a plan to bring Himself further glory and redeem His people. Its going to play out in the next few chapters. Stay tuned, and bring a friend; you won’t want to miss it!

Grace and Love to you,

Pastor Randall

**Following God into Uncertainty**

**Ruth series intro; Chap. 1 Bay Point Church 5/10/15**

Sermon notes