

YOU CAN'T FLEE FROM YOUR TROUBLES!

Ruth 1:1-5

This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, April 8, 2007 Sunday evening

Nothing, in such a brief way, describes the story of Redemption as well as the book of Ruth. Boaz, the male hero in the story pictures the Lord Jesus Christ—as the redeemer.

An underlining truth pervades this short story of the domestic life of Ruth and Naomi. You cannot deny, once you study the book, the pathway of providence. Christians are not always sure they are guided and protected by God. Yet, there is a single verse in the book of Ruth that assures us that God controls our lives and destiny. The King James Version expresses it so well, *“So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech,”* (Ruth 2:3). What seems to merely happen to Ruth was nothing but the providential direction of God. She happened upon the right field, at the right time when the right things were happening! It is said that large doors swing open on small hinges! Certainly that was truth here. What appeared to be a minor happening introduced Ruth to what would become life changing—life transforming. The concluding lines of the book of Ruth establish clearly the lineage of one of Israel’s great kings—King David. *“to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David,”* (Ruth 4:21-22). Ruth becomes the great grand mother of David. And it is not accidental either, that Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind will be known as “the Son of David.” He came from that family. Not only does the book tell about the family, but the location from which the Savior would come. We sing, “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” and should remember that the Christmas story began centuries ago with the incidents mentioned in the book of Ruth—about the place called “Bethlehem-Judah!”

There is more to the story than redemption. It tells the two major pillars upon which redemption rests. First, the book tells about finding grace. Ruth 2:2 (NASU) says, *“And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.”* The favor mentioned in this translation concerns grace. The King James Version speaks of *“him in whose sight I shall find grace.”*

If you would spend the time and trace the various times in which “finding favor” is mentioned in Scripture, you would find one of the most beneficial truths in the Bible. The first mention of such favor occurred when Noah was escaping the worldwide flood that would destroy the world. Genesis 6:5-8 reveals the contrast:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

A common expression about the various offerings to be given to God was that they were—*“An aroma pleasing to the Lord.”* No wonder that Jesus was always spoken of as being in favor with God and man, (Luke 2:52, Matthew 3:17, 17:5).

Having the favor of the Lord relates always to the grace of God. When the gifts of the Spirit are mentioned in I Corinthians 12, the better expression of them is that they are “gracelets.”

Grace is more than what the typical definition says. Grace is described as “the unmerited favor of God.” But grace is more! It is living continually with the unmerited favor of God in your life! So, the question of Ruth is profoundly significant. She asked, *“Why have I found grace in thine eyes?”* (Ruth 2:10). You enter the grace of God, as Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Coupled with grace is the theme of rest. Because Ruth found grace, she went on to find rest. That explains why Ruth 1:9 is significant: *“May the Lord grant that you may find rest . . .”* Or as Ruth 3:1 says, *“Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?”* Nothing is more touching and secure for Ruth than the words of Boaz, as her kinsman redeemer, *“Under whose wings thou art come to trust,”* (Ruth 2:12).

Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”* (Matthew 11:28-29)

Not all who experience salvation by the grace of God are able to enter the rest of redemption. Hebrews 4:1 SAYS, *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”* Then verses 9-10 say, *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”*

The book of Ruth, then not only illustrates the power and provision of grace, but demonstrates the way of entering the rest of God.

IT STARTS SO DARK!

The opening verses of Ruth (verses 1-5) give a most sweeping picture of the circumstances that Ruth and Naomi faced. Trouble was everywhere.

Warren Wiersbe called this chapter, “You can’t run away.” He opens by saying, “A family makes a bad decision and exchanges one famine for three funerals.”¹ Wiersbe reminds us the old saying that you cannot run from your troubles. Wherever you go, you will have to face them again.

In David’s Psalm on God’s knowledge and presence, he speaks of his undying confidence in God’s ability to keep him. He says:

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, History, (Colorado Springs, CO: 2003), p. 178.

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. (Psalm 139:7-12)

Sometimes, trouble is so overwhelming, it seems all hope is gone. That was what is must have felt like for Naomi and her husband Elimelech.

IT WAS DURING THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES

No other time, in all of Israel's history that conditions were so dark. Immorality and idolatry continually swept the country. When the people repented, the Lord sent them deliverers. But soon, the people were back in the depth of degradation. The concluding verse of Judges characteristics the mood of the time: "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes,*" (Judges 21:25). It is then a bit remarkable to discover the meaning of Elimelech's name. It means "God is my king." Apparently, because of the actions of Elimelech to run out of the Promised Land to settle in Moab, He no longer saw God as his king.

THERE WAS FAMINE IN THE LAND

This is all the more remarkable since the meaning of the name of Bethlehem means "house of bread." Judah means, "praise." So Bethlehem Judah was a wonderful place to raise our children. But all was not well. A famine invaded the land. Suddenly the land of milk and honey became desolate because of the sins of the people. God had warned them: "*If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit,*" (Leviticus 26:18-20, cf. Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24).

PHYSICAL FAMINE FOLLOWS SPIRITUAL FAMINE

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 assure nations of God's blessing if they will simply obey Him—"*It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.*"

For Judah to have famine clearly indicated that Israel was disobedient to God. When a nation or person lives under an "open heaven," they are living in obedience to God, (see Matthew 3:17).

But the famine was far more than physical. Amos 8:11 says, "*Behold, days are coming,*" declares the Lord GOD, "*When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.*"

We are living in such a time. While the pulpits are full of preachers, there is widespread lack of “*Thus saith the Lord.*”

THEY SOJOURNED TO THE LAND OF MOAB

Psalm 108:9 says, “*Moab is my washpot.*” That means that Moab had a lowly place with God. The image is that of a disgraced nation forced to wash the feet of victorious soldiers. Such words recall the Prodigal son who went into a far off country, squandered his estate with loose living. Luke 15:14-16 (NASU) says:

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

Elimelech’s family became a prodigal family—journeying to Moab.

Moab has a sorted history. The name originally came from the birth of Moab which was from the incestuous relationship Lot has with his elder daughter, (Genesis 19:30-37). During Israel pilgrim journey from Egypt to the land of Israel, they treated Israel harshly, (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). When Balak attempted to bring a curse upon Israel, he was able to use Moabite women to seduce Jewish men into immorality and idolatry, (Numbers 22-25).

So often, with the prophets, special judgment is often issued against Moab. Jeremiah 48:11 has several phrases that describe Moab:

Moab hath been at ease from her youth. That means that the national disposition of Moab was unconcern or indifference. She was spiritually lukewarm nation.

He hath settled on his lees. Lees are the dregs that go to the bottom of a vessel when wine is fermenting. The pictures a people who settle down without doing anything with God

And hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel. Instead of stirring themselves up with moral excitement, Moab remains spiritually inactive and stagnate.

Neither hath he gone into captivity. God’s judgment has not yet fallen upon Moab. She is on the brink of disaster—but not quite there yet.

Therefore his taste remained in him. That means, the old sinful appetites are still active and alive.

And his scent is not changed. Scent in the Bible often refers to discernment. It means they had “*noses . . . but they smell not,*” (Psalm 115:6). They are incapable of detecting what is right or wrong.

THEY WENT TO MOAB—ELIMELECH, HIS WIFE AND TWO SONS

Apparently, the union between Elimelech and Naomi was not that good. Their spiritual decline is reflected by the names of their sons. Mahlon means “unhealthy,” while Chilion means “puny.” The boys must have been sickly.

But after lingering in Moab ten years, Naomi is so changed that she demands that her name to be changed to “Mara”—that is, “bitter.” The land of Moab has brought bitterness into her life.

THE TWO SONS TOOK MOABITE WOMEN AS WIVES

For the sons to marry women of Moab was to break the Mosaic Law. Jews were never to marry Gentiles, (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, Nehemiah 13:1-3, Ezra 9:1-4). In fact, according to Deuteronomy 23:3, these were the very people that were forbidden by God from entering the congregation of Israel to ten generations. With grace, however, the blessings of God are secure for 1,000 generations.

Orpah means “deer” or “fawn.” It could also mean “a portion of the neck or back.” Here name either implies that she was an athletic type or she turned her back on spiritual matters. She refused to go to Bethlehem.

Ruth means “satisfied” or “beauty.” You might call her “Miss Personality.”

DEATH CAME TO ALL THE MEN

What a tragic conclusion to the time in exile. It is like James 1:15—“*When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*”

But, let us not linger too long here. You can never know how great redemption is until you realize how devastating sin is! Romans 5:20-21 explains:

But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.