

Ruth 1:1-5
Trust God Even in the Unseen
2018-01-07

God is working his plan of redemption, so we trust him even when his hand is unseen

This morning we begin studying a new book of the Bible, the book of Ruth. It's a short book, with 85 verses that span 4 chapters, and it's tucked away in the pages of the Old Testament between the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. You can sit and read the entire book in about 5 minutes, but don't let its length fool you into thinking it is of small significance; this is a very important book. Many people are familiar with what takes place between Ruth and Boaz, two of the main characters, and think that this is a heart-warming love story. While that does play a role in this book, that's not the story this book is telling. This is a book about God's mercy and God's merciful redemption. Boaz is one of the main characters in this book, and he is a kinsman-redeemer, but he's not the redeemer this story is ultimately about. The book of Ruth shows how God would accomplish redemption through our greater Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus.

Remember in **Luke 24** after Jesus rose from the grave, how he met two disciples on the road to Emmaus? They didn't recognize Jesus, and they were troubled about what had taken place in recent days. They said they hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem, but their hopes were crushed when Jesus was crucified. **The circumstances being what they were, they had all but lost hope.** But then Jesus opens to them the Scriptures, "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (v.27).*" Not long after this they recognize Jesus, and they go immediately back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that Jesus had been raised. Even though they thought hope was lost and darkness prevailed, God was actually working to carry out his plan of redemption. His plan will prevail and his purposes will not be thwarted, even when it seems that everything has stacked up against it. God's work of redemption will be accomplished - that's the story of Ruth.

Scripture Passage: Ruth 1:1-5

As we begin our study of this book this morning, I first want to bring you to the end of the book. Do you ever go back and read stories again after you've finished them? Really good stories can get us to do that, can't they? And sometimes, once you know the ending, there are lots of details throughout that you now understand and see the significance of. The book of Ruth is that way; it's a story that makes more sense and reveals its great significance when the end is known and its purpose understood. So we're going to look ahead and read the end, **Ruth 4:18-21**. It's not what we'd expect if this were a typical boy-meets-girl love story, such as "And they lived happily ever after." This book ends with a genealogy, because it's not a love story. In fact, this book finds its place in the story of redemption, which is why a genealogy is such a fitting ending. It ends with a genealogy that comes to David, who would become king of Israel, and play a very important role in redemptive history. **2 Samuel 7:16** "*And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.*" **Matthew 1:1-6** "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.*" From Ruth and Boaz would eventually come David, and from the line of David would come Jesus. In a time of darkness, in an unexpected way, God shows his plan of redemption is still on track. In this small book of Ruth he reveals that, despite the sins of man and human efforts contrary to God's will, he is still sovereign. **God is working his plan of redemption, so we trust him even when his hand is unseen.**

When God's hand is unseen, we trust his word and not our circumstances

1. **v.1** "*In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land...*" - Right away in **v.1** we're given a time and place. This isn't, "Once upon a time." This is a real story, with real significance.
 1. The **time** when the judges judged. We spent more than half of 2016 studying the book of Judges. We saw the cycle, the downward spiral, that the nation was in during this time. **Judges 2:8-10, 16-19; 21:25**. It's during this time that the story in the book of Ruth takes place, during a spiritual low-point in Israel's history. They had received the law, conquered the land, and now walked in rebellion.
 2. The **place** this story begins is the land of Israel, the land of promise and blessing. This was the land that was flowing with milk and honey. Remember when the spies returned from scouting out the land, that they returned with a cluster of grapes on a pole carried by two men (**Num. 13:23**)? This is that land. But here we begin to see a problem. We read that there was a famine in the land, so this man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in Moab with his wife and two sons. This was about 50 miles away.
 3. What do we know of Moab?
 1. **Gen. 19:37** The son from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter.

2. **Numbers 22-24** They didn't allow Israel to pass through their land to the Promised Land, and Balaam was hired by Moab's king to curse Israel.
 3. **Numbers 25** The people of Israel begin to worship the god of Moab, Baal of Peor, entering into relations with the daughters of Moab as acts of worship.
 4. **Deut. 23:3-6** *"No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. But the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loved you. You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever."*
 5. **Judges 3** Eglon king of Moab oppresses Israel for 18 years.
4. So take what is known about Moab from God's word, and does this move to Moab seem like the obedient thing to do, or simply the most pragmatic thing to do? But this is where they move to. **He puts his family in a tent at the sewer treatment plant because rent is cheap and the grass is really green.** Does this look like trusting what God's word would have us know and do, or being swayed by circumstances? No mention of prayer by this family, no prophetic utterance instructing them to move. What does this look like for us? It could be a physical move. It could be any one of a thousand decisions we make in a day. Are we considering God's word in our decisions, or only what seems to be the most sensible at the moment? With decisions about education, a career, growing a family or training our children. And do we have enough Biblical literacy to find God's word useful in decision-making?

Transition: We trust God's word and not our circumstances. We drive even a little deeper here, though, and see our second point.

When God's hand is unseen, we trust his will and not our clever solutions

1. **v.2** Let's follow this through, this move motivated by circumstances. We're given the names of the family members. Ironically, the father's name Elimelech means "God is King". **V.1** tells us they went to sojourn in the country of Moab, which would be like camping out. But the end of **v.2** tells us, *"They went into the country of Moab and remained there."* What was first just intended for a short time has now started to put roots down. First it was parking a camp trailer, but now the awning and outdoor carpet are replaced with a porch. But look ahead to the end of **v.4**. There we read, *"They lived there about ten years."* They've now built a permanent roof over their trailer. It's home.
2. **v.3** *"But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died..."* **v.5** *"...and both Mahlon and Chilion died..."* What was the reason for leaving Bethlehem? To escape the famine and, presumably, avoid death. And how did that work out? But that's not all. What else took place in Moab?
 1. **v.4** *"These took Moabite wives..."* - Before the sons died they married. Living in Moab, who would they see and have available? Moabite women. When Israel was preparing to enter the land, Moses commanded them not to marry women of the land. **Deuteronomy 7:1-3** *"When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons."* But notice, the Moabites aren't listed. Why? Because they were outside of the land that Israel was moving into. This was like looking for a loophole. Israel wasn't explicitly forbidden to marry women of Moab, but it was certainly frowned upon. Any descendant was restricted from access to the assembly of the Lord for 10 generations (**Deut. 23:3**). Nehemiah understood marrying women of Moab as foolish and leading to great evil (**Neh. 13:23-27**).
 2. Elimelech's seemingly clever solution didn't really solve anything. Instead it multiplied sin and sorrow. How much better to trust the will of God than to seek our own clever solutions. What was God's will? Let's return to **v.1**, what seemed to drive all of this change for this family.
3. **v.1** They were from Bethlehem, which means "house of bread." This was in the land flowing with milk and honey. There is no question that this land could produce abundantly. But during this time it wasn't. I wonder if we have anything in God's word that might reveal to us why. What was God doing with this famine?
 1. **Lev. 26:3-10, 14-20, 21, 23, 27** (similarly **Deut. 28**). There was blessing and there was curse. What was God's purpose with the famine? He wasn't testing the ingenuity of his people, their resilience, or their clever solutions. His purpose was to bring them to repentance.

2. Not every distress or trouble we are confronted with is a result of our sin and requiring repentance, but we should always start with considering it as a real possibility. The fact of the matter is that many of our troubles and distresses are a result of our sin. Difficulties in relationships can continue as a result of unkind words or unloving actions, even done some time in the past. Sometimes financial stresses have been caused by poor stewardship, sometimes because of slothfulness, laziness, or neglect. We'd be wise to stop and consider if repentance would be the first step in the right direction before considering a move to Moab.

Transition: Lastly this morning, and because we know we are sinners...

When God's hand is unseen, we trust his mercy and not our ability

1. We see the providence of God at work in Ruth. Even in this darkness, and despite the disobedience, rebellion, and sin, God was still at work to accomplish his plan of redemption. We see this story starting poorly and getting worse. We see the efforts of man resulting in sin and death. But we see the powerful hand of a sovereign and loving God, working things together for the good of his people and the glory of his name.
2. **v.2** *"Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah."* This is the most specific thing we've come across so far. We're not told anything about how the men of this family died, how old they were, what the weddings were like, or what they did to eat in Moab; the author knows that is unimportant. But we're given great detail about where this family was from. This ties it back to the genealogy at the end of the book, and helps us to see the purpose of God at work in the book of Ruth.
 1. **1 Samuel 17:12** *"Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons."* **Micah 5:2** *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."* **Matthew 2:5-6** *"They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Conclusion: Where we end our study this morning it seems like hope is lost and darkness has prevailed. Famine and death. But into this darkness God shines the light of his salvation. The book ends with a birth announcement and genealogy. The book of Ruth will show us that God will accomplish redemption. God is working his plan of redemption, so we trust him even when his hand is unseen.

Family

Table Talk



January 8, 2017



GOD'S TRUTH

We are to wholeheartedly love the loving redeeming God!



Family Discussion ?s

1. Deuteronomy 6 provides the reason and inspiration for Pillar Bible Fellowship's Family Table Talk. This chapter contains verses that are printed on every Table Talk- do you know which ones they are?
2. Teaching our children God's Word- His works, His ways, His testimonies, His statutes, His commands, His promises- motivate and instruct us as Christian parents. This week, take this opportunity to do what verses 20-25 instruct. Children- Ask your parents where the Lord God has brought them from; what He has done to bring salvation to them personally; what blessings have they experienced; why do they so greatly want you to know these things?
3. Parents- Tell your children the testimonies of His work and love in your life. Tell of His statutes and commands. Encourage your children with these words.
4. Spend time in prayer together as a family over the wholehearted love we are to show to our Heavenly Father each and every day. Be blessed by His provision and faithfulness.

Key Verse

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."
Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids further into God's Word...

1. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

2. Deuteronomy 6:20-25



Scripture Memory: Deuteronomy 4:40

"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." - Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (ESV)