



Time to Reflect

Q1. How do we hold on to hope in the midst of what life throws at us, in times of chaos and crises, illness and death?

Q2. If you had to name them, what would your 3 best qualities as a person be, and your 3 worst?

Last week we reflected on Joshua, a Godly leader who knew the blessing of God and who trusted Him completely. This week we move forward approximately 266 years and turn our attention to Ruth, one of only two females to have books in the Bible named after them.

To set the scene, the book of Ruth, only four chapters long, was written in 12th century BC, at the same time as the book of Judges, but there could hardly be a greater contrast. Ruth reads like a romantic novel whereas, in Judges, there is mass killing, rape, a prostitute cut up into pieces, civil war, evil priests. They were turbulent, violent times with wars, raids and counter-raids, *“when everyone did what was right in his own eyes”* [Judges 21:25 NLT]. Or, as The Message puts it: *“people did whatever they felt like doing.”*

Overview of Ruth 1:1-22

- Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem in Judah and move to the country of Moab because of famine
- They have two sons, Mahlon and Killion, but unfortunately Elimelech dies
- Mahlon and Killion marry two Moabite girls, Ruth and Orpah
- But some ten years later both brothers die
- Ruth and Orpah are now widows and childless (as is Naomi)
- Naomi decides to leave Moab and return to Bethlehem in Judah
- Ruth accompanies her but Orpah chooses to stay in Moab and is never heard of again
- Ruth and Naomi are in destitute poverty
- Beginning of the barley harvest

These three women have suffered much:

- Bereavement, grief, despair
- Childlessness, emptiness, perhaps bitterness
- Loss of support and protection
- Financial loss and destitution
- Heartache in the parting of ways

“The story of Ruth was written to give us encouragement and hope that all the perplexing turns in our lives are going somewhere good. They do not lead off a cliff.

In all the setbacks of our lives as believers, God is plotting for our joy.”

(John Piper)

Character Profile

- Ruth was a beautiful character, both inside and out. She was full of humility and yet she was full of humility. She had the sort of boldness that men find attractive. She was loyal, with a serving spirit, but she was not passive or an underdog by any means.
- Ruth is loyal, faithful and kind – all the more impressive for taking place in this period of strife.

On four occasions she said “I will” to Naomi. In being so loyal to Naomi she demonstrated her love for her. “Loyalty” and “love” are almost the same word in Hebrew. Love that is not loyal is not true love. Likewise, God’s covenant love for his people means that he sticks with them through thick and thin.

- She was committed, first of all to Naomi and then to Naomi’s God. Ruth willingly accepted an unsettled future and bound herself by solemn oath not only to Naomi but also to the God of Israel. God was evidently real to her, even though she had seen him punishing his people.
- Ruth found “favour” in the eyes of the Lord, and the Lord did not stop showing his kindness to her.
- Ruth testified about her faith in God, for Boaz knows that she is committed to “God, to whom you’ve come seeking protection under his wings”. (2 v.12 MSG)
- Ruth is obedient, and follows all her mother-in-law’s instructions.
- Behind Ruth’s kindness lies the kindness of God.

But from the battles we see the breakthroughs and blessings for Ruth:

- Despair to contentment
- Bitterness to happiness
- Unemployment to employment
- Emptiness to fullness
- Destitution to security and hope
- The blessing of a child
- Although God is not directly identified as being involved, He is frequently mentioned in the book, as the characters ask Him to bless others. Naomi asked the Lord to bless Ruth for being with her. The harvesters asked God to bless Boaz and he returned the blessing to them. Boaz asked the Lord to bless Ruth for choosing him.

There are intertwining threads which weave together to make the fabric of the story of Ruth:

- **Relationships, redemption and restoration** - we see that tragedy and loss affect good, honest people as well as bad [Ecccl 9:2, 11]. We also learn that there is no shortage of grief in this world. We all face all manner of losses as well as grief and, in the face of unbearable loss, we are wise to seek comfort and solace in others. It is also a picture of God’s redemptive love and His amazing plan for all humankind.
- **Unconditional love:** Another quality in Ruth is unconditional love - loyal love, the kind of love that simply refuses to let go, and it’s a powerful force for good in this darkening world. We need it in marriage, in family relationships, we need it in friendships, and we need it in our Church families. Likewise, God’s love for us is unconditional and the goal of His love is to have us with Him throughout eternity. He made this possible through His son, Jesus, and His sacrifice on the cross. [1 John 4]
- **Trust and obedience:** Ruth put her trust in her mother-in-law’s plan and, is obedient and follows all her instructions. Likewise, we should trust in God’s Word and obey God’s will.
- **Hope:** Boaz takes on the role responsibility as kinsman-redeemer. He pays the ransom, to redeem the land owned by Elimelech, and marries Ruth. Boaz gives us a picture of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus, the Son of God, is our kinsman-redeemer and He is our hope.

Three lessons to take away from the story and example of Ruth:

1. **Put our faith into action:** share the gospel - tell others of your Christian journey: of how God has blessed you; and be blessed as you bless others through a small kindness.
2. **Have humility and industriousness:** in all our work, paid and voluntary, do it all with a willing heart, as if we are doing it for the Lord [Colossians 3:23].
3. **God is with us:** although we may not see it, God is present at all times. He is with us in our mess and stress in the realities of life, and our times of joy too. We may not feel it. We may not see it. But God’s unseen hand is always at work in our lives – and that is hope. That is what we should hold on to.