

“Concern for the Moabites”  
Ruth 1  
(Preached at Trinity, February 14, 2016)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The Book of Ruth opens with the introduction of the Elimelech family who left Judah during a famine to dwell in the pagan land of the Moabites.  
**Ruth 1:1 NAU** - "And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons."
2. As I’ve pointed out, this was a serious act of compromise. Elimelech and his family were God’s covenant people. God had placed them in Judah for a purpose. They were to remain separated from the surrounding nations. As I pointed out, our sinful decisions are not without consequence.
  - A. Elimelech left Judah for the ease of Moab not knowing that he would die in that pagan land. And he had no idea the effect it would have upon his family.
  - B. Naomi’s two sons married pagan women and planned to settle down in Moab, but they failed to recognize that their life was also in the hands of a sovereign God.  
**Proverbs 27:1 NAU** - "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth."
3. Things unfold quickly in this narrative and by the time we get to **Verse 5** Naomi has lost her husband and two sons and is left alone with her two Moabite daughters-in-law. The rest of the chapter is about Naomi’s return to Judah and about the amazing faithfulness of her daughter-in-law, Ruth.
4. Before we move on to **Chapter 2** I want us to take note of the complete disregard of God’s covenant people for the spiritual well-being of the pagan people around them.
  - A. God’s purpose from the beginning was to show mercy upon all the nations of the earth.  
**Genesis 22:18 NAU** - "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."
  - B. To the Savior God described the universal nature of His mission.  
**Isaiah 49:6 NAU** - "He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."
5. We certainly wouldn’t pretend that Israel had an evangelistic charge. In fact, they were told to remain separate from the pagan nations, to make no covenant with them and to drive them from their land. But God purposed that Israel would be the light of the nations.  
**Isaiah 60:3 NAU** - "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising."
  - A. They had God’s Word which was to be spread to the ends of the earth.
  - B. They served Yahweh who was the only one true God who had no rivals.

6. What is striking in **Chapter 1** is how little regard Naomi and the women of Judah had for the spiritual condition of these Moabite women. Naomi's advice to Ruth was basically, "Orpah has returned to her gods. I'm sure all will be well. Why don't you do the same." **Ruth 1:15 NAU** - "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."
7. While Israel may not have been charged with a powerful evangelistic emphasis, we certainly have. The implications of **Chapter 1** are powerful.
  - I. We too can be insensitive to the seriousness of idolatry
    - A. These Moabite women had lived with God's people for years
      1. **Verse 4** tells us it was almost 10 years.
      2. In all likelihood, Orpah and Ruth were allowed to worship their gods without being told of the great danger. Chemosh was the chief Moabite god. His name meant destroyer, apparently because they believed in his supreme power.
      3. This was a particularly wicked idolatry that included human sacrifice. In **2 Kings 3** the Moabite king offered up his first born son to Chemosh.
      4. Ruth and Orpah were probably never told that God is the Judge of all men. That He is all powerful, and will not allow the presence of other gods. **Isaiah 42:8 NAU** - "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."
      5. We know at least Orpah remained true to her gods the entire 10 years she dwelled with them.
      6. Naomi seems to have seen little problem with Orpah returning to her gods and her pagan life. **Ruth 1:15 NAU** - "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."
      7. Naomi shockingly prays that God would give her daughters-in-law rest in the midst of their idolatry—in a life outside the covenant community of God's people. **Ruth 1:9 NAU** - "May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband."
 

There can be no rest outside the community of God's people! There can be no rest as long as we fill our lives with idols. There can be no rest apart from God.
      8. Our knowledge of Orpah ends with **Verse 15**. Perhaps she returned home to her family, married a nice Moabite man, had a house full of children, and died and went to hell.
    - B. How fearful are we of the gross idolatry all around us.
      1. The love of material things in our generation is idolatry. The Bible refers to covetousness or greed as idolatry. **Colossians 3:5 NAU** - "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."
      2. It is all around us today yet we think little of it. The Elimelech family probably thought little of Orpah and Ruth worshipping their false gods.
      3. We are always in danger. When we do not see the seriousness of idolatry we can be drawn into it ourselves.

4. The clearest testimony to this is the life of King Solomon
  - a. The Bible tells us he had many wives, many of which were from pagan lands. Solomon allowed his pagan wives to continue worshipping their pagan idols. Later in his life they turned his heart from God.  
**1 Kings 11:1-4 NAU** - "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, <sup>2</sup> from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. <sup>4</sup> For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods"
  - b. Solomon even set up a shrine to the Moab god Chemosh. This would have been the god of Ruth and Orpah. The Bible refers to it as detestable.  
**1 Kings 11:7 NAU** - "Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab"
5. The sons of this Hebrew man Elimelech whose name meant God is King allowed their wives to worship pagan gods. And after their death Naomi was perfectly comfortable with them returning to their families where they could worship their detestable gods. God was surely not King in this home.
6. An important aspect of evangelism is pressing the demands of Christ upon the lost. The Gospel demands the putting away of idols.  
But it must begin with us.

## II. We can fail to recognize the importance of our testimony

- A. There is no indication that this Israelite family impressed upon these Moabite ladies the greatness of Yahweh—that He is the Creator, the God of all the earth, that all other gods are but idols.
  1. There is no indication that these Moabite women were warned to bow before this God.
  2. It would seem that the Elimelech family didn't really comprehend God's greatness themselves.
    - a. They found it too easy to forsake God's people and His Worship and move to a pagan land. And they remained there long after the famine had ended.
    - b. There was little in their lives and the life of their family that would stir these pagan women to flee from their false gods and embrace the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
  3. Don't forget, they found the land of the Moabites most appealing. It was a land with plenty to eat. They had decided to settle down. Had Naomi's sons not died they most likely would have never left.
  4. It is a dangerous thing to settle in a land of paganism  
It is a dangerous thing to forget we are the people of God.

B. There are many examples of God's people being thrust into the midst of paganism while maintaining their integrity and upholding their testimony

1. Daniel

**Daniel 6:7-10 NAU** - "All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> "Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." <sup>9</sup> Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction. <sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."

2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego facing the fiery furnace

**Daniel 3:16-18 NAU** - "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. <sup>17</sup> "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> "But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

3. Esther boldly went before the king to represent her people

**Esther 4:16 NAU** - "And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

4. The Apostles preached boldly even at great personal risk

**Acts 5:28-29 NAU** - "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

B. What about our own situation?

1. We are surrounded by paganism and idolatry. We are continually being tempted to compromise. We are tempted to become like those around us.
2. What a powerful testimony when we remain true to our God, when we don't embrace the ways of those who do not love and follow Christ.
3. What a powerful testimony when we demonstrate that we serve the one true God who is worthy to be praised.

III. We can fail to receive new converts into our community

A. Naomi returned to Bethlehem with great fanfare

1. Naomi was the talk of the town. Gossip sounded loudly throughout the town – **Verse 19** - "all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"
2. The text doesn't tell the whole story. It's been over ten years. You can imagine the gossip.

- a. But one thing is grossly missing from their conversation. There is no mention of Ruth. “And who is this young lady with you? What is her name?”
  - b. And Ruth is also absent from Naomi’s dialogue. All she can think about is herself.  
**Ruth 1:20-21 NAU** - "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"
  - c. Missing is something like, “Let me introduce you to my daughter-in-law, Ruth. She has been such an encouragement to me. What a blessing she has been in my life. She has remained by my side through every sorrow. She has pledged herself to God and His covenant people.”
  - d. And these Israelite women were not about to reach out to this Moabite woman.  
It is as if Ruth isn’t even there! She seems an outcast from the beginning, one not to be easily embraced into the community. How she must have felt she was invisible.
  - e. Later when the excellent character of Ruth is being sounded abroad we see no effort by the town’s ladies to reach out to these destitute widows. What a testimony of graciousness it would have been towards this new convert.
- B. How well do we embrace new converts and new members?
- 1. How well do we make all of our members feel like they are a part of us?
  - 2. Christians are sometimes guilty of maintaining a closed group  
Will we allow people in our own church to feel like they’re invisible or do we embrace all as being dear to us?

#### Conclusion:

- 1. The amazing thing about Chapter 1 is the wondrous conversion of Ruth. It doesn’t seem like anyone was looking out for Ruth’s spiritual well-being. But God was.
- 2. In spite of the poor testimony of God’s people around her God brought her to faith.  
**Ruth 1:16 NAU** - "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."
- 3. In fairness to Naomi, in **Chapter 2** we find the Boaz has heard testimony of Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi. This testimony could have only come from Naomi herself. And we do find Naomi working behind the scene to secure Ruth’s future in God’s covenant community.
- 4. In spite of the weakness of the Elimelech family God was still able to use this family to bring Ruth to Himself. Naomi had her flaws, but so do we. How often we fall short of God’s holiness both in word and deed. But how wonderful it is that God can use us in spite of our weaknesses to bring people to saving faith.