

In Times Like These

[Ruth 1:1-5](#)

I don't have to remind you this morning that we are living in some extraordinary times. Most, if not all of us here, cannot remember living through anything like this. Not since 1918 when the Spanish Flu killed off something like 2% of the population have we as a nation faced anything like this. These are trying times, times of uncertainty, times where we began to see the worst in people. We see a frenzy in people, a fear, fueled by the media, and double-talk from our leadership. If we are not especially careful, in times like these, with our normality disrupted, we can lose sight of the very foundations of the faith we hold so dear. I don't have any concrete answers regarding the future here this morning. I don't have any quick solutions to give you. I would remind you however, that we are not the first to face hardship. I would also remind you that our God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and that He is still in control ... regardless of what the media says.

The passage that we will be looking at this morning, introduces us to a small family who also faced some extremely hard times. It is my prayer that the Lord might speak to you through this passage and provide blessing, comfort and hope for you personally, and us corporately, in times like these.

Rth 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Rth 1:2 And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Rth 1:3 And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

Rth 1:4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

Rth 1:5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Two milk cows are standing in a pasture. Suddenly a big milk truck zooms by. Painted on the side is a gigantic milk cow, twelve feet high and forty feet long. Over her are the words, "Sanitized! Pasteurized! Homogenized! Idolized! Milk! It does a body good!" That big cow zoomed by at 80 miles per hour and was out of sight in an instant. One cow in the pasture turned to the other and said, "That sure makes a body seem inadequate, doesn't it?"

Well, when we read the Book of Judges we feel inadequate at the Super Saints who go zooming by—

- winning battles with trumpets (ZOOM!),
- killing armies with bones (ZOOM!),
- tearing gates from their hinges (ZOOM!);
- and getting visits from angels (ZOOM!).

We feel the same as we listen to Super Saints on radio and TV.

- "I was healed (ZOOM!)."
- "God gave me a sign which parking place to use and I found my husband (ZOOM!)."
- "I pray an hour every day (ZOOM!)."

And here WE are still sick in spite of prayer, wondering what God's will often is, wondering if we will ever get a husband or

a wife and running out of things to say in our ten minute daily prayer time. Can you identify?

Well, take heart! The Book of Ruth is for ordinary people like you and me. Listen, almost all Christians experience some signs and miracles in their Christian life, but these are the exception and not the rule. Ninety-nine point nine percent of the time we must use common sense, experience, the advice of trusted people and prayer, hoping, without being given miraculous signs (ZOOM!) that what we do is right.

According to our passage, Elimelech moves his family to Moab when draught comes and practically every preacher, that preaches on Ruth charges him with sin and getting outside the will of God. Yet in Moab Ruth, the great, great grandmother of David, is found, which apparently was the will of God.

Naomi wants Ruth to marry Boaz so she uses common sense. She tells Ruth to bathe, put on some perfume, wear her best clothes and snuggle up close to him. I believe she probably prayed, but we aren't told she did. But the marriage took place and God blessed it with a baby.

Rth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

Rth 4:14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed *be* the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

Rth 4:15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of *thy* life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

There are no big MIRACLES or SIGNS in Ruth, but there are everyday miracles, unseen, as good people make the best decisions they can and pray and trust God to help them make the right ones. Don't get too upset when super saints ZOOM by. You, in your quiet confidence in God, probably have more miracles in your life than they will ever see.

While I was writing this sermon I was listening to my favorite radio preacher. He was preaching on Daniel in the lion's den and talking about the lions in our life.

He said, "The farmer who has lost his crop does not yield to despair but he praises God." (ZOOM!) "The Christian mother whose baby is snatched away by sudden death is not frantic but is comforted by the assurance that she will join her child in the Father's house." (ZOOM!)

Now, folks, I would hope, in the end, that I could overcome financial reversal or even the death of my child, but it might and probably would be in the grip of despair. To say that I must praise God when my baby dies is too much for me, but I believe if I cling to God while frantic, and serve Him as best as I can each day, which may not be much under those circumstances, He will see me through. And he will bring me one day to the point of praise.

That may not be the way of the super saint but it's the way of a lot of good ordinary folk in Ruth, whom God led and blessed and used even though they weren't twelve feet high and forty feet long. As we zero in on a little home around 1100 B.C. it is surrounded by a sea of moral garbage because it was according to verse 1 of our text "**during the days when the Judges ruled**". And according to chapter 17 verse 6:

Jdg 17:6 *In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

Doesn't that sound a bit like the country we are living in today. Everyone doing that which was right in his own eyes. Nevermind, that it might be wrong for everyone else looking

in, it is right for that individual. They are going to take care of number 1.

- Is it right to hoard groceries in the face of a supply shortage? No, but for the people doing it, it is perfectly fine.
- Is it right to have insider information, and sell of millions of dollars of stock shortly before a disaster strikes? No, but if you ask our Washington leaders that did it, it was perfectly fine.
- Is it right after seeing a sign telling you that a lane on the freeway is ending, to remain in that lane until it ends so that you get ahead of those already stopped, to get ahead of those who had the intelligence, the moral compass, and the common courtesy to get over back when they saw the sign? No, but you see it everyday.

Now, with the exception of my second example, I know that none of these are against the law, but they are wrong on many other levels. The point is that moral relativism is nothing new. It was around in the days of Ruth, and it is alive and healthy in Dickinson, Texas today.

But I would also like you to see this morning that inside this land are beautiful, ordinary people as well. Look first at ...

I. **The Tranquillity We Want**

Rth 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Rth 1:2 And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Notice that there are four people living here and they seem to have what we all want. Call it happiness, call it peace, call it security, call it what you will, we want it. We want to have a home where we can love and be loved. We want to be right with God and see our loved ones in heaven. We want financial security to meet our needs and give us some of our wants. And we want to live in a nice town with nice people, helping them and them helping us.

This family lived in the peaceful village of Bethlehem, six miles out of Jerusalem, where David saw the glory of God in the night sky. Bethlehem means "house of bread" pointing to its fields of grain.

- Elimelech, the husband and father's name, means "The Lord is King" so he probably had godly parents who thanked the Lord for him.
- Naomi, whose name means "delight" or "sweet" or "pleasant", is just that, even though many criticize her (Wiersbie, McGee) all through the Book as a Prodigal.
- The two boys' names may mean "sickly" and "consumption" and we know they died young. This weakness was a negative but every home has its down side.

They are called EPHRATHITES the old word for Bethlehem.

Gen 48:7 And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet *there was* but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same *is* Bethlehem.

Many take this to mean they were influential and belonged to the aristocracy of Bethlehem. Boaz, Elimelech's relative was very wealthy.

Rth 2:1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name *was* Boaz.

Put all this together and you have the tranquility, the piety and the security we all want. Wouldn't it be nice to live like this, die of old age in our sleep, meet our family in heaven and not have any serious troubles?

Well, I'm not going to knock it. I want it. But we live in a world where life can and often does crash in upon us, and the all important thing, is what we let the hard times do to us.

Before we look at the hard times that come upon this home, however, I want to remind you that if we are blessed with a good life with few great tragedies, we can and should serve the Lord in our tranquility. We should not look to Him only in hard times.

Here, in our little homes, making our living, raising our kids, attending our church and helping our neighbor, we can be every much a champion for God as the Deborahs, and Gideons and Samsons and Billy-Grahams.

Dr. James Dobson, through his books and radio programs, could be considered a giant for God when it comes to rearing children, fighting for family values in Washington, and saving babies from the torture of abortion. About all we can do is look at him and Billy Graham and Mother Teresa and say, "Wow! Go for it!"

But do you know God **looks through the window of our home and says the same thing to us.** James Dobson in his book *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives* (Word Pub.), tells us about George McCluskey, his great-grandfather.

Toward the end of his life he had a burden for his children and their children and theirs, etc. So, every morning at 11:00 he would go out behind the barn and pray for generations yet unborn.

Dobson says this about him, "Though my great-grandfather is long dead, having died a year before my birth, he still

provides the richest source of inspiration for me”. God gave Mr. McCluskey a normal, tranquil life and in return, he gave it to the Lord.

We’ve looked at the tranquility we want. Now look at ...

II. The Adversity We Face

First, let’s look at:

1. The Disaster.

Rth 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land.

Without warning, the tranquility was halted by adversity as famine fell upon Bethlehem. There was no bread in the house of bread. Only a farmer truly knows the horror of the word "famine." It could have been due to draught or locusts or from enemies like the Midianites in Gideon's day.

Concerning the Midianites, we read:

Jdg 6:3 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

Jdg 6:4 And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

Jdg 6:5 For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; *for* both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it.

I remember seeing a farmer in Florida on TV burning his orange groves after they were killed by frost. He was keeping

insects from coming and spreading to his neighbors' groves. His strong, tanned face was unashamedly covered with tears. He said, "This land has been in my family for generations and now I will have to sell it to pay what I owe."

This is what happened to Elimelech and his family—tragedy, and it can happen to us in different ways. In fact, we are seeing the beginnings of this happen around us as we gather here this morning.

We have looked at the disaster, now let's look at:

2. The Decision

Rth 1:1 And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Rth 1:2 And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Elimelech did what was hard—move away from his home. And he did what he no doubt thought was best for his family. Some (Wiersbie) see the famine as God's judgement pointing to verses like Deut. 28:20-25. Here is the paraphrase, "If you do evil (the Lord) will bring disaster on you ... disease after disease ... scorching winds to destroy your crops. No rain will fall and your ground will become as hard as iron. Instead of rain the Lord will send down dust-storms and sandstorms ... The Lord will give your enemies victory over you." Whew! Now we know why insurance companies call floods, etc., "acts of God."

Since it was a judgement of God, they say, Elimelech should have stayed in Bethlehem and repented. The text, however, does not hint that this was a judgement of God, and even if it was, there's no hint of sin in this family as the cause.

The same commentators who criticize why they went, criticize them more for where they went—Moab. In the

Psalms, God calls Moab his washpot. This city was about 60 miles southeast, on a high plateau on the other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea.

- Moabites were related to Israel, coming from the incest of Lot with one of his daughters, while drunk.
- Being relatives, God ordered Israel not to take their land.
- When Israel came out of Egypt Moab hired Balaam to curse them and sent women to entice them to have sex in the worship of their Baal.
- They worshipped the god Chemosh to whom children were sacrificed.
- When Israel came to Canaan Moab refused passage through their land and when Israel was in the land they once oppressed them once for 18 years, until Ehud killed their fat king Eglon.
- Because of their incestuous birth and immoral worship God ordered that they not be allowed in the worshipping community of Israel.

Despite all of this, it was not a sin for Elimelech to do the sensible thing and take his family there. David, when hunted by Saul, went there and took his parents there for safety. Not only is he not rebuked for this in scripture, he said in [Psalm 57](#), which is usually applied to this period, "They prepared a net for me, they have digged a pit before me ... Yet, in the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge until these calamities pass by". Friend, if it was all right for David, it was all right for Elimelech.

Super saints may not move until they get a word from the Lord but sensible saints will use the experiences and common sense the good Lord has given them. Why would God give us a brain if He didn't want us to use it?

If a decision does not violate scripture and makes sense to me and to those whose opinion I respect, then 99 times out of a hundred, I can trust that it is God's will for me. And if we

bathe the whole decision making process in prayer and surrender to God's will, He will reveal to us that one time in a hundred when we are **not** to do the sensible thing. A poet once wrote:

With calm brave purpose
Every day renew,
And let each moment,
Planned and precious be
And thou shalt find
Thou hast time to do
What God requires of thee

Super Christians like that gigantic cow may ZOOM past the rest of us with their pipeline to heaven, telling of daily indications from God that they are in His will. But the folks in Ruth, and the rest of us, like you and me, can pray, do the task at hand and trust that His purposes can and will be realized through us, when visible evidence can't be seen. The Bible says:

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

I like what one author said,

"A lot of the time we spend seeking God's will in our lives is wasted—egocentric nonsense concerned with our belief that because we are the center of the universe, everything we do must be ascertained as the will of God or the purposes of God will be thwarted." (Stephen Brown, IF GOD IS IN CHARGE, Nelson-Publishers; Nashville, TN, p. 96)

The most difficult part of prayer is to know our part and God's part when we make decisions. We are to use the common sense and experience God has given us, and yet we shouldn't rely on them as the only measurement. We are to

go to God in prayer, say "Thy will be done!" and turn the whole matter over to Him and **then**, use our common sense and logic, trusting God to stop us. If logic leads us away from His will. We've looked at the disaster, and the decision. Now let's look at the death.

3. The Death.

Rth 1:3 And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.

Rth 1:4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

Rth 1:5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

It sure looked like the wrong move to Naomi because the first thing we read is that Elimelech died. The spotlight shines now on Naomi and the Holy Spirit says in verse 3, "She was left all alone with her two sons".

If going to Moab was a sin, it wasn't Naomi's sin. But she who had lost her home, had now, lost her husband. Why they stayed on in Moab we do not know, but her two boys married two Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. This was something not specifically forbidden by Jewish law because they were related to the Jews. All went well for ten years and then, BOOM! Life crashed in on Naomi again, as both of her sons died. The Holy Spirit writes again in verse 5 that "The woman survived her two sons and her husband".

How quickly, my friends, can life crash in on us. We hear on the news how a person attending the rodeo cookoff came down with COVID 19 and died. Not only this, but many others were infected, and lives were changed in an instant.

Why do things like this happen? I have to confess that, I DO NOT KNOW! But Naomi saw all that happened as God's personal will for her life. She says in verse 20 that "**The Lord has dealt bitterly with me**". To some this is the path to peace. Truly, Job said that the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21). A poet once wrote:

In the center of the circle

Of the will of God I stand

There can come no second causes

All must come from His dear hand

All is well, for 'tis my Father

Who my life hath planned

Well, my friends, I simply cannot find peace in that position. I know we have to live in a world of disease, and car wrecks. I know some troubles come from Him to punish, and some to produce the fruit of character. But to say every particular terrible event like this is from His hand and part of His wonderful plan for me, is something I find difficulty in doing. But this I do know, and I do wholeheartedly believe this ...

Rom 8:28 **And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.**

No matter what comes our way, why ever it comes. He is in it with us and will, if we let Him, make good come out of it. In fact, He did that here, for next we see ...

4. The Divine Providence

Rth 4:11 **And all the people that *were* in the gate, and the elders, said, *We are* witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house**

of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:

Rth 4:12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

Rth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

Rth 4:14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed *be* the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

Rth 4:15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of *thy* life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

Rth 4:16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

Rth 4:17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he *is* the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Rth 4:18 Now these *are* the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,

Rth 4:19 And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,

Rth 4:20 And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,

Rth 4:21 And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,

Rth 4:22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

Down in Moab Naomi found 3 very special things:

- She found Ruth, the ancestress of David.
- She found Boaz a wife blessed of God.
- And she found herself a grandbaby.

Whether it was right to go to Moab, unwise to go to Moab, or a sin to go to Moab, God was there with them and worked out His wonderful purposes. And He will do the same thing for us. When this crisis passes who's to say what kind of wonderful stories we will be able to share concerning the Lord at work in our lives and others.

There is an ancient ritual told concerning an American Indian tribe. Seems that, when a boy reached the age of 12 he had to prove his manhood. Two braves carried the boy, all alone, to the deepest part of the forest. They left him there with a bow and arrow, in the darkness of night. And no matter what happened, he was not to move from where he sat. The terrified boy would make it through the night and when dawn came, he would see his father, sitting on a rock nearby. He had been there all through the night with him.

In times like these, life throws some hard choices our way and, like Elimelech, we move to our Moabs, not always knowing if it is right or not. How wonderful to know that we love and serve a God who will never leave us, nor forsake us. How comforting to know that we can boldly pass through the valley of the shadow of death, because our Good Shepherd leads the way. How amazing to know that we worship a kind, merciful, and loving God, that is capable and willing to work even our bad decisions into blessing, for our sakes, and for His glory.

A young soldier wrote this poem, gave it to a buddy and the next day went into battle and never came back. Here's what he wrote.

I'm standing guard at sunset

But I know I'm not alone

There's another One who's watching
From His place upon a throne
He's my Lord, my Great protector
Who once died to make men free
He is watching. He is guarding
He is taking care of me.

Let's pray.