

AM Ruth 1 Cost of Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] Verses 67-79 I must add it was great to see the young children here some very young and some growing up I'm sorry I didn't bring a children's talk with me but you can maybe listen to God's word as we read it. The first reading is actually in the New Testament and it's a reading from a man called Zechariah who was very thankful to God and we can read that passage in Luke chapter 1 from verse 67 So this is what Zechariah says And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying that was John the Baptist's father and this was the Holy Spirit speaking to him and this is what he said Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to show us the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant the oath that he swore to our father Abraham to grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days and you child will be called the prophet of the most high for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who are set in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace may God bless his reading from his own inspired word now we'll take our turn to the Old Testament to the book of Ruth and chapter 1 the book of Ruth chapter 1

I'm reading from the beginning to the end of the chapter I'm reading from the ESV but I have to admit my version is from America so there might be one or two slight changes but anyway Ruth chapter 1 the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land and a man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab he and his wife and his two sons the name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi and the names of two sons were Malon and Chilion they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem and Judah they went into the country of Moab and remained there but Elimelech the husband of Naomi died and she was left with her two sons they took Moabite wives the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth they lived there about ten years and both Malon and Chilion died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband then she rose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food so she set out from the place where she was from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah but Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law go return each of you to her mother's house may the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me the Lord grant that you may find rest each of you in the house of her husband then she kissed him and they lifted up their voices and wept and they said to her no we will return with you to your people but Naomi said turn back my daughters why will you go with me have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands turn back my daughters go your way for I am too old to have a husband if I should say I have hope even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons would you therefore wait till they were grown would you therefore refrain from marrying no my daughters for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me then they lifted up their voices and wept again and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her and she said see your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods return after your sister-in-law but Ruth said do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you for where you go

I will go and where you lodge I will lodge your people shall be my people and your God my God where you die I will die and there will I be buried may the Lord do to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you and when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her she said

no more and the two sons of them and the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem and when they came to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred because of them and the woman said is this Naomi she said to them don't call me Naomi call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty why call me Mara why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me so Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her who returned from the country of Moab and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest so may God bless this further reading from his own inspired word let us again join turning to the book of Ruth this morning

I'd like to turn to the book of Ruth chapter 1 that we read together I'm trusting you all can hear me okay okay I was looking at this in a different way than I have in the past I read somewhere that the book of Ruth it's got various characters as you know and as we read here in the story like Elimelech Naomi Orpah and Boaz but this one thing I read about the book of Ruth is that above all these characters it's the character of God that is the centre of the story so I thought I'd try to look at it in that way so it's interesting that in chapter 1 when Naomi is introduced to God she uses two different titles for God one the Lord another

El Shaddai the Almighty at the end of the chapter you see that for example verse 20 for the mighty has very bitterly for the mighty has dealt very bitterly with me and that's a name of God called El Shaddai the Almighty so I thought I'd look at it thinking about the cost of discipleship but looking at an aspect of trying to identify Naomi's recognition of God as Lord Yahweh the covenant God and God as El Shaddai God Almighty and see what we can learn looking at these titles something about discipleship at the same time so in verse 6 you come across first of all if you look at verse 6 then she it's about

[9 : 11] Naomi she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food so there is the covenant God she's referring to there in the land of Moab she recognises God as this covenant God a God who she can enjoy a relationship with I think that's what discipleship is all about having a relationship with God who is the Lord who is a covenant God and it reminds us of this relationship and we looked into the New Testament in our first reading which pointed towards a new covenant eventually in Jesus Christ and this new covenant was promised as you know way back in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 33 this is a new covenant I'll make with my people of

Israel after that time I'll put my law on their minds and light it on their hearts I'll be their God and they will be my people and that's the centre of discipleship and that's our hope as people who are following Christ that promise the way back in Jeremiah looking forward to a new covenant and this is what the author of the Hebrews says about this how Christ is a mediator of a new covenant that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance now that he's died as a ransom to set them free from their sin committed under the first covenant so as you look into this covenant language Ruth is a book full of covenant language you come across various key words right through the book of Ruth all pointing towards this covenant and that's how Naomi recognises God when she speaks to him there when she was listening out for God here's Naomi stuck after ten years in a foreign land it looks like Naomi was listening out for this God it shows that in her discipleship she was aware of God's voice speaking to her she was heard in the fields that the Lord had visited his people so I think that's also part of discipleship listening out for God who has promised this covenant relationship with us and there she was listening out for God there in Moab and recognised God as the Lord and as she becomes again into a relationship that had slipped had strayed from God's path in my opinion and gone down to Moab but now she was waiting to return that word again and she rose with her daughters in law to return from the country it's a word that occurs quite often in Ruth's return it's about

Naomi returning to the Lord that she had known previously before she came into Moab when she was in Bethlehem the house of bread and so this book as it starts out in verse one reminds us the kind of setting that Ruth as you might be aware the setting behind the book of Ruth verse one tells us it was when the judges ruled and that takes us back to the previous book of the judges which you all know there's two things that highlight the book of judges there's many more but two things that echo through the book of judges they had no king and also everyone did right in their own eyes and that kind of attitude in the book of judges again as we'll see brought

I think in God's judgment this famine when Naomi in verse six there she talks about the Lord had visited his people that word visited in the Old Testament it's a visit of God either in two different ways God either visits in wrath or God visits in mercy in the book of judges there's the wrath of God coming out and again in my opinion that's why the famine came about because of the way people were behaving and that was a visitation of God in his wrath I understand in a way but now there's a different kind of visit in verse six of the Lord it was a visit of blessing and that's how the Lord will visit people he'll either visit people in his wrath or visit people in blessing depending on the relationship with God people who know God as their

[14 : 38] Lord will get blessed people who know God just or don't know God I'm afraid will come under the curse of the covenant and if you go back there's a well-known chapter in Deuteronomy chapter 28 if you've got time it goes through all the curses of the covenant and included in these curses if you read it carefully is a famine and this is King Solomon in his prayer it's in 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 35 his prayer recognises that famine is a curse this is what his prayer says there when the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you that's just one part of his prayer but it helps us understand that Solomon in that prayer recognised famine had come about because of disobedience and that is what

I think I understand here but Naomi in verse 6 is encouraged because the Lord has visited his people and that's why we read in Luke chapter 1 about Zechariah's words there that we read in Luke chapter 1 because he as you might remember as we read talks about another visit of God and he visited God here in blessing and was going to bless and Zechariah in his words in Luke chapter 1 talks about this visitation of God in the Son of God looking towards God's visit there so this is Naomi calling God Lord and recognising the relationship that that meant for her and for the people and this news that she had heard made her sadness turn to joy that God had visited them protecting them providing for them was concerned for them and as

Zechariah says blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people so God's visit made Naomi realise about she was in a relationship if you like a disciple of God in this covenant relationship and she is listening out and praising God because of his visit do we praise God because of his future visit that Zechariah is talking about the visit of the Lord Jesus Christ here is Naomi just giving thanks to God and moving on because she recognised God visited his people to give them food how much more should we acknowledge his visit of his son and so here is Naomi praying thinking and listening out but then in verse 8 of the chapter

Naomi said to her two daughters in law go return each of you to her mother's house may the Lord deal kindly with you not only is this Naomi a disciple who recognises the closeness of God in this covenant relationship but she has this praying relationship to God praying to him and praying for others as she says there go return each of you and the prayer is may the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and me she's praying to God in this relationship that she enjoys and again this is another thing as disciples we can enjoy this just coming to God it's so natural isn't it Naomi she just she just prays may the Lord just it just comes so naturally to her this prayer may the

Lord deal kindly with you and again the covenant language there is so evident in that word kindly as many of you have probably heard many a time and that's the special mercy of God that she's thinking about there she's praying to God who she's enjoying this relationship with and so we have here that she's praying to this Lord who she's enjoying a relationship may the Lord deal kindly with you and then in verse nine again she prays again the Lord grant that you may find rest each of you in the house of her husband she bursts into prayer a second time praying over these two women and praying for them and praying them using that word the

[20 : 02] Lord and not only is I think Naomi a disciple but she's discipling Orpah and Ruth who'd come from an idol worshipping background and she's teaching them something about God in these prayers and I think if you read between the lines what happens afterwards with Ruth's commitment so well known is that Ruth's listening to Naomi praying recognising in Naomi's faith and her use of her language something that speaks to her even even in these short prayers we don't have maybe all the story but according to what we have there's these two short prayers that Naomi is praying and I think that helps Ruth with her commitment later on the communication of Naomi's faith speaks so clearly to Ruth and that's something that should encourage us in our discipleship when we're praying for others just a wee prayer over someone may the

God grant you blessing may the God grant that you may find rest and that's a great prayer isn't it to pray for someone that they would find true rest by coming to Christ who said come unto me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest and so having faith in the Lord means communicating that faith to others in prayerful ways and I think that was used to bring Ruth to faith it passed from Naomi to Ruth how else would she come into faith because she was brought up in a heathen background worshipping heathen gods but through this new contact that she had made she's learning about Naomi's God she's the Lord he's the one has this covenant relationship discipleship so that's

Naomi teaching Ruth about something about discipleship it's a God who you can enjoy relationship a God who you can pray for a God who will visit and then the other side of discipleship is taught and she teaches Orpah and we know the relationship with Orpah what happened first of all both of them are following Naomi and following after Naomi and we know the story so well Naomi's testing Orpah all the time and Ruth about their true commitment and trying to teach them that discipleship means giving your all to God and that's why Ruth responds in her way she knew the cost it would cost her I'll go where you will go I'll lodge where you will lodge I'll leave my country and I'll go with you I'll leave my gods and your people my people your God will be my gods so Ruth recognised something of the cost of discipleship and Naomi's approach to Orpah she was teaching Orpah something about the cost of discipleship and trying to make her realise what commitment to God really meant if you're going to enjoy a relationship with God it means dedicating your life to him forever it means communicating to him in prayer it means all these things I remember when we first were active in Leith many decades ago it was the time of evangelical campaigns which some of you might remember I won't say too many names at that time but what stuck with me at that time I think I've got this name right the heralds is that right Daphne the heralds were an evangelical group in fact one of them we met not so long ago in Bellevue Church it was encouraging to know that somebody you'd met way back in the 70s was still faithful and active but anyway that's another story and the purpose of these evangelical campaigns was obviously to preach the gospel to people who had no idea what commitment to God meant and that happened the gospel was preached but also what the heralds did was also have what they called counsellors and so there were Christians who were committed to Christ who had that standing and if anyone showed any interest in what the gospel was saying as a call went out you know come to Christ they met with them and prayed with them and tried to teach them what

[25 : 29] Naomi was teaching Orpah okay you're emotional now because you've heard the call going out but this is what it means this is what it will mean for your life it will change your life it means you'll have to leave these gods Orpah and nowadays it means you would have to leave certain things bad habits you have to leave them in the past so there was this counselling going on it wasn't just an aspect of the gospel going out I remember vividly because I was asked to be one of these counsellors and you met these people who had heard the gospel and also what happened after that was that you made sure that the people where do you live right there's this church near you I'll go with you to that church and see how you like it so there was follow up I'm not saying it was perfect but I'm just saying

I vividly remember the importance of explaining to people the cost of discipleship and counselling them saying it's like the seed falling you remember the parable of the seed some of joy sprang up so quickly that when the trials happened they fell away and I think that's what that particular I remember the heralds had that policy as I say there might be faults with it but still God was using it and I think that's something of what Orpah was doing here Naomi to Orpah she was trying to emphasise the cost of discipleship that everything has to take Christ has to take pre-eminence in your life Orpah if you're going to follow me that's more or less what I think she was emphasising both in

Ruth who came to realise what it meant she realised that she would have to go and dodge and leave her gods behind but to Orpah she went back to Moab and what does it say to her gods and so while Orpah clung to Moab Ruth clings to Naomi the contrast her commitment was forever and we've read that once or twice in verses 16 and 17 through the faith of Naomi Ruth we could say in today's language Ruth was converted and she became a follower of the Lord and this was done in Philippians 3 we read forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heaven word in Christ Jesus so that's the first thing briefly about the use of the word Lord here just the way it's used throughout this

passage here reminding the characters of the covenant God the one who they can enjoy a relationship the one who can visit them with blessing the one who they can pray to but the cost that might entail if you decide to follow this

Lord but then as I said in verse 20 the name of God as you might have in the footnotes I don't know but it's El Shaddai which you probably heard of I think in the older versions they never translated the names of God I can't remember but it's El Shaddai the Almighty and of course there's plenty choruses about El Shaddai nowadays now that's the root behind that use in verse 20 Naomi reminding herself that he isn't just the Lord he's the El Shaddai he's the Almighty God the one who can intervene in situations it's first used in Genesis 17 when Abraham was 99 years old the Lord appeared to him and said I am God Almighty and this is what it entails when that revelation came to Abraham okay I'm the God Almighty so walk before me faithfully and be blameless so the revelation of God being Almighty has implication of discipleship in that we're to walk before him faithfully and blamelessly and I think this is where Elimelech fell down because there's plenty warnings in God's word about not having relationships with Moab and if you think it's in Deuteronomy 23 if you've got time afterwards there's specific guidance there from God it all happened when Moab had refused to help and later Balak the king tried to curse them and if you read Deuteronomy 23 it's a background that says don't mix with them don't seek a treaty or friendship with them as long as you live and so there's these warnings way back in

[31 : 07] Deuteronomy about mixing with the Moabites but Elimelech refused to listen to that advice and went to Moab forgetting that he was God Almighty as I said at the beginning I think God had visited him in his wrath with the famine but instead of living in relationship with God through the famine he left that relationship and tried to escape what he thought might be a death sentence and ended up ironically dying fairly quickly when he reached Moab along with his two sons he forgot that God is El Shaddai the Almighty and as disciples of Christ it's good to remember that second title of God El Shaddai the God Almighty the God who can intervene sadly for Elimelech he disobeyed

I think the guidance of God and went to Moab the problem was the lack of bread I don't think in Bethlehem the problem was a lack of right relationship with God that was the problem I think and I think that lack of relationship as I've seen Solomon praying in his prayer was evident in Elimelech's life you know in the first five verses it's described about Elimelech I hope I'm right here but there's no mention of God there's no mention of looking for guidance there's no mention it's only when you reach verse six and so the absence of God and Elimelech's life forgetting that God is almighty and this is something that should encourage us when we're going through difficult times yes he's the Lord he's a covenant God but he's the almighty he can do things that are powerful ironically the king as you know

Elimelech means my God is king but yet he didn't let the king and his power rule over him and whose God is king that's what Elimelech means but he failed to obey that very same meaning of his word recognizing the sovereign king the mighty king in his life so it's something to remember in the second name of God that's used here not only is this God the Lord but he is almighty the one who can change things and intervene in our lives so Naomi recognizes God as almighty and she calls him the Lord and she calls him El Shaddai and recognizes him as the one who brought her back empty changing her name from

Naomi to Mara recognizing it was all the Lord's doing it was the Lord that had done this for her I went out she says it's my fault and that was Naomi's recognition of God that she came back through notice how the chapter ends it says and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest it reminds us that when we are blessed by God there is a new harvest that's spoken about in the New Testament not a harvest you go out to the fields with but a harvest of souls and I think that's interesting how the chapter ends they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest a harvest so it's these two things I want to remain with you the thought of the cost of discipleship running through the theme of chapter one

I want to finish with a poem which is well known there's a poem by Corrie Ten Boom which you've probably heard before I'll try and read it to you my life is but a weaving between my God and me I cannot choose the colours he weaves steadily of time he weaves sorrow and I in foolish pride forgets he sees the upper and I the underside not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly while golden roll the canvas and reveal the reasons why the dark threads are as needful and the weaver's skilful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pardon he has planned he knows he

loves he cares nothing this truth can dim he gives the very best to those who leave the choice to him Amen may God bless these few thoughts from his word shall we conclude by singing is pleased in psalm 116 how would to have come he's