

AM Ruth 1 A Hidden God

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[0 : 00] In the Bible at the page 267. Let us hear the word of God.

In 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 his two sons were Malon and Keleah. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in 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. These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth.

They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Keleah died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then 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.

[1 : 20] So she set out 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 them, 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, 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.

[2 : 29] 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 so 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. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[3 : 35] I went away full. And the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? And 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 barley harvest. Amen. And I saw something that really annoyed me.

I don't often go to shops, I have to admit. But I was getting some paint. And I was waiting for the paint to be mixed. And I was standing in this shop. And I saw something. And it really annoyed me. On the floor of the shop, there were all these markings.

They were markings that we were very familiar with during COVID times. And it said, stand here. And then a couple of meters, there was another mark to say, stand here. And arrows directing you in and out of the shop.

[4 : 38] Leftovers from the days of the COVID pandemic. And why did it annoy me? Well, I don't know about you. But personally, I don't really even want to think about those days.

For all of us, it was not a good time. No matter who you are or what your situation in life is. Those COVID days, the days of the pandemic, were not good times. And you don't want to go back there.

Do you? You don't want to start thinking about it. There are one or two people who are sort of heavily into it. And they can tell you the date of the first lockdown and the date of the second lockdown.

And what happened on such and such a time and all of that. But for the vast majority of us, we want to forget it. And yet the reality is that in many ways, normal life went on throughout the days of the pandemic.

To some degree, people got married. Albeit a bit differently, babies were born. People started new jobs.

[5 : 44] Most of them online, granted. But nevertheless, it happens. Family life continued in a time of national crisis.

And here in the book of Ruth, in the very first verse, we're told, In the days when the judges ruled. See, what we have here in these four chapters is an account of family life.

During the time of the judges. For the children of Israel, the people of God. The time of the judges was not a great time. There was conflict and division.

There were days when they were prevailing in battle. And other days when they were being defeated. It was a time of crisis and difficulty for the people of God.

And here in this book of Ruth, we're given an account of a family and what happened to a family during the time of the judges.

[6 : 44] During the time of national crisis. And it is to this first chapter I want us to turn this morning. Now, how are we going to get into these verses?

Well, let me suggest a four-fold approach. Let's think about a dodgy decision. And then we'll see an embittered saint.

We'll also note a remarkable conversion. And a hidden God. A dodgy decision. An embittered saint. A remarkable conversion.

And a hidden God. What is this dodgy decision that I'm speaking about? Well, here is a family. The man is called Elimelech. And his wife is called Naomi.

They have two sons. Malon and Kilion. Aren't they great names? You know, Old Testament Bible names are coming back in. In terms of what people are calling their children.

- [7 : 47] Haven't you noticed that? I have 13 grandchildren. 12 boys and 1 girl. And I think 8 of them have Old Testament biblical names.
- Jonah and Isaac and Judah. But I haven't come across a Malon and Kilion yet. It's interesting. Yes. What great names.
- So here's Elimelech and Naomi and the two boys. They live in Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And there's a famine, it seems, a fairly localized famine around Bethlehem. So Elimelech, the father, he says, We're going to Moab.
- Now, you've got to recognize the era that we're looking at here. I don't think Naomi would really have had any input into that decision.
- Yes, Elimelech was the head of the household. And Ephesians 5 speaks about the husband and about headship and about leadership within the family. To that we clearly adhere.
- [8 : 50] But nowadays, when you would be making a decision like this, deciding to leave your home and go to another place, I would think that you would discuss that with your wife.
- You wouldn't just arrive in from work one day and say, Now listen dear, we're going to Manchester tomorrow. Oh, for a trip. No, for the rest of our lives. Yes. Yes. So that's what they do.
- They leave Bethlehem Judah. They go down to the land of Moab. Now you might say to me, Well, there was food in Moab and there was no food in Bethlehem.
- It was a good move. A good idea. From a physical, natural point of view, it was a good decision. There was food there. There was no food in Bethlehem Judah.
- But they were leaving. They were leaving the land of promise. They were leaving the covenant people of God. They were moving out into a land of pagan darkness.
- [9 : 53] A land where the people worshipped the pagan god Chemosh. And one of the things involved in the worship of that pagan god was child sacrifice. If you read Deuteronomy 23, you'll find there God's attitude towards the land of Moab.
- And God's attitude towards that land and that people was one of antagonism. They were not sympathetic to the people of God or to the cause of God.
- And here is Elimelech making a decision to leave God's people. To leave the promised land. To go out into a land of pagan darkness.
- All because there was food there and there wasn't enough food in Bethlehem Judah. It was a decision that was driven by material and physical needs.
- He wasn't looking at this from a spiritual perspective. Jesus tells us that we're to seek first. The kingdom of God.
- [11 : 00] Paul encourages us in Colossians chapter 3 in those opening verses. Great verses in Colossians 3. What does the apostle say? If you've been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.
- Set your mind on things above. Not on things that are on earth. What does that mean in real terms today?
- So here you are. Maybe you've got three children. And your house is small.
- I have no one in mind. I'm just plucking us out of the air now. You've got three children. Your house is small. You have a cat and a dog. And you're on top of each other. Children are growing up. They're becoming teenagers.
- You don't have much room. And one day you see a house for sale. Four bedrooms. Three en suite. You know. Hot tub in the garden. Decking.

[11 : 59] And you say, that's it. We can afford that. We're going there. Well, from a material and physical perspective, it seems like a good idea, doesn't it? But what are the questions as believers in Jesus Christ that we should be asking?

We should be asking, what will this do to me spiritually? Will I be able to attend a church where the Bible is preached, where the people of God meet together in fellowship and prayer?

Will my children come under godly influence here? Will I be able to serve the Lord in this place? It may be good from a material and physical perspective, but is it good spiritually?

And that's the key thing that we need to ask as the people of God. Perhaps you're at that stage in life where you're having to think about downsizing.

None of us like to face that, do we? Well, we're not old enough for that yet. But there comes a moment where perhaps you have to face it. And you have to think, you know, are we going to make a move here?

[13 : 06] Am I going to go into an apartment or a granny flat or whatever? And it's a crucial decision to be made. But if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you've got to look at it from a spiritual dimension.

And consider, what will this do to my involvement among the people of God in the church of Christ? How will it impact me spiritually? So Elimelech makes a decision, and it's a dodgy decision, because he's taking his family away from the people of God and bringing them down into a land of pagan darkness.

Now secondly, I would like us to see here an embittered saint. Now I feel the need to defend myself, because I'm thinking here of Naomi.

Let me just say I have every sympathy for Naomi. I have every sympathy for her. As I've already indicated, she was probably not involved in this decision-making process to go down to Moab.

When she gets there, after a time, her husband dies. And after a time, her sons, Malon and Cillian, they both die.

[14 : 31] And they have married, they have married women from Moab, Orpah and Ruth. So here is this poor woman. She's left in Moab, without her husband, without her sons, and with two grieving daughters-in-law.

She doesn't have family support. She's away from God's people. Your heart goes out to her. This is a deep, deep trial.

She hears that there is food now in Bethlehem, and in Judah. And after some ten years, she makes a decision to return home to Judah.

And when she comes into Bethlehem, the people are looking at her, and they're talking a bit. And they're saying, Is that Naomi? Boy, she's changed. You sure that's her?

And she hears them. She's chattering in the corner. And she says, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. Which means bitter.

[15 : 46] See it there, please. Verse 20. Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. Again, verse 21, the second half.

Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, when the Almighty has brought calamity upon me. Oh, some people will say, Now, she's not bitter.

All she's saying there is, I've had a bitter experience. But what about verse 13? At the close of the verse, It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake, that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

You see, God brings trial into the lives of his people. Isn't that true? Into the tapestry of our lives. God wheezes into that tapestry threads that are dark.

Circumstances and situations that are hard and difficult. And we can respond as a people of God in one of two ways. That trial can embitter us.

[16 : 53] We can cry out, Why is this happening to me? I'm not deserving of this. Or else we can receive that trial as something that has come from the hand of a loving God.

And he's brought it into our lives and experience that we may cast ourselves in a new way upon him and grow deeper in our walk and fellowship with him.

In the last congregation in which I had the privilege of serving in Belfast for 24 years, there were people in that congregation who had experienced deep, deep trials.

Trials way beyond anything that I have ever had to experience or know of. Deep, deep, deep trials. And one of the most moving things was to see the grace of God at work in their lives.

Sustaining them in trial. Moulding them. Shaping them. To become more and more like the Savior.

[18 : 04] A dodgy decision. An embittered scene. A remarkable conversion.

So Naomi receives word that there's food back in Bethlehem so it's time to get up and to go there. Her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, who were obviously both very fond of her, were told in verse 7 that both of them went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But at some point, at crossroads, she stops and turns to these two daughters-in-law and she tells them to both go back. Don't be coming with me. You just go back to your mother's house and to your family.

There's no point coming with me. I'm an old woman. There's no point coming with me. You know, the prospect of marriage is very limited. You'd be far better to stay where you are.

But one of the girls, Ruth, she is determined to go with Naomi. Look what she says, Ruth.

[19 : 17] Verse 16. Ruth said, This is a confession of her faith.

How do I know that? Well, she uses the covenant name for God. May the Lord do so to me. And more also, if anything but death parts me from you.

She is committing herself to God, to Jehovah, to the God of Israel. She is turning her back on the worship of Chemosh, on the worship of a pagan god.

And she is committing herself not only to the Lord, but unto his people. When we come to a living faith in God, we are saved by the grace of God.

We experience the forgiveness of God. We're adopted into the family of God. And we commit ourselves to the Lord and to his people. And that's exactly what Ruth is doing here in this great declaration of faith in verses 16 and 17.

[20 : 31] Why do I call it a remarkable conversion? Well, remember where she grew up. She didn't grow up hearing the law of God. She didn't grow up among the covenant people of God.

She didn't grow up with all the privileges and blessings that Malon and Kilian had had. She grew up in a land of pagan darkness. But God was pleased in his grace to call her out of that darkness into the light of the gospel.

God was pleased in his grace to show her her sin, that she would recognize that she was lost before a holy God, and to reach out in faith unto the Lord who alone was able to save her.

She hadn't been to Sunday school. She hadn't been instructed in her home in the things of God. She hadn't attended a church where the Bible was preached.

She didn't associate with others who were believers in Christ and to pastor Christian books to read. She was in complete darkness. But God in his grace called her out of that darkness and brought her to living faith in the Lord.

[21 : 47] Can I say to you this morning, this is the most important thing. Above everything else. Above everything else.

This is what matters more than anything else. to have a living faith in the Lord and to be trusting in his Son, Jesus Christ, as your Savior.

No one else is able to save us. No one else is able to bring us into right relationship with God. There's no other way of experiencing God's forgiveness apart from coming in brokenness unto the Lord and crying unto him for mercy and salvation.

We have broken God's law. But here is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He came from heaven into this world. He came as our substitute and our representative and he has kept the law in our place, on our behalf.

We deserve to die because we are lawbreakers. But here is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has come from the glory of heaven into this world and he has gone to the cross there to die in our place, bearing our sin, taking the judgment that we deserve.

[23 : 09] It is vital and essential this morning, my dear friends, that you are looking to Christ and like Ruth, trusting in the Lord.

A dodgy decision, an embittered saint, a remarkable confession, and a hidden God.

Where is God in this passage? Where is God here in Ruth 1? Well, we have seen the Lord here in his grace at work in the life of Ruth.

But where else do we see God in this passage? Can I suggest to you that we see God here in that he is declaring his plan for the Gentiles.

In the Old Testament days, God was largely focused upon Israel, upon the Jewish nation and people in terms of salvation. But there are hints throughout the Old Testament.

[24 : 20] Think of Naaman, think of Rahab, and think here of Ruth. Of men and women from the Gentile nations who come to a living faith in the Lord.

There is a hint here given to us in this Old Testament passage that God has a plan and a purpose for the nations of the world, for the Gentile peoples.

And of course, through time, that came to happen, didn't it? after the cross, after Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit upon the nations of the world, the gathering in of men and women, not just from Israel, but from all the nations of the world.

It's a very wonderful matter that in that genealogy that we have in Matthew chapter 1, that Ruth is included in that genealogy. The ancestors, if you like, of Jesus according to the flesh.

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. Here is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the family tree of Jesus according to the flesh and included in there is none other than Ruth, this Gentile woman who has come to faith in the Lord because God has been pleased in his grace and love to draw men and women into his kingdom from the nations of the world, from the Gentile nations.

[25 : 58] Sometimes I think we don't make enough of this. You see, you and I, we don't really think of ourselves as being Gentiles, do we? I mean, if you were talking to me afterwards and you said, well, who are you?

And I said, well, I'm Gareth and I come from Belfast and I'm married and I've got four children but they're big and they're grown up and I have grandchildren and I relax by watching the Parliament Channel and I support Leeds United and I'm a Gentile.

You would think that's weird. Now, you wouldn't say that to me because I can see you're nice people but on the way home in the car you would say, did he say? I'm a Gentile.

Wasn't that strange? See, we don't really think of ourselves like that but brothers and sisters, we should be so thankful this morning that God in His grace came in love to the Gentile peoples that they may hear the good news of the Gospel and be saved by the grace of God.

We see then something here of God's plan for the Gentiles but we see something here especially of God's providence. Naomi makes a decision one morning.

[27 : 25] She gets up and she says, do you know what? I'm going back to Bethlehem. She didn't feel any big, big pressure weighing in upon her as she made that decision.

She reflected on the situation. She didn't really know people in Moab. Her family were in Bethlehem. She needed to get back to the people of God and today was the day when she's going to make the move.

And yet God, the God of providence, the God who provides for His people and the God who guides His people was at work in her life. Directing her footsteps, guiding her path.

So she with Ruth, they return to Bethlehem and notice what it tells us. The very last sentence in the chapter, they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

And if you read through the rest of the book, you know the story how this was the very best time in which to return. Ruth was able to go out into the fields and glean there. And that barley was being left for her and for her mother-in-law so that they were provided for.

[28 : 34] God directed Naomi and brought her back to Bethlehem at exactly the right moment. And that's how God is at work in our lives this morning.

Brothers and sisters, he's guiding and directing us. He's overruling in everything. He's ordering our footsteps. We are making decisions consciously and definitely before the Lord.

There is that element of human responsibility but the hand of our sovereign God is upon us in all that we're doing, working out his plan for our good.

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense but trust him for his grace behind a frowning providence. He hides a smiling face.

[29 : 46] take heart in this this morning brothers and sisters take heart. Your life may seem messy. Your life may seem disordered.

You may wonder what is happening here. But God the God of providence the God who directed Naomi is the God who is directing you all as well.

he makes no mistakes. He's working out his purposes in your life. Let us pray.

We thank you oh God our Father that you give to us men and women in scripture. Men and women of faith but you present them to us openly and honestly just as they are.

we see them oh God in their weaknesses and failures as well as in their strengths. Help us to learn from the life of Naomi and the life of Ruth.

[30 : 53] These matters that we have reflected on in your word apply them onto our lives individually we pray. We thank you that you are the sovereign God. We thank you that you are the God of providence.

We thank you that you are directing our path. we thank you that all things all things work together for good to those who love you.

Hear us oh Lord cleanse us we pray for Jesus sake Amen. Amen.