

When all that is left is Love!

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Date: 17 November 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, throughout history, and certainly in our own culture, when life becomes tough, when life becomes difficult, when, say, people lose their jobs, whether it's businesses falling, I know certainly when we saw that in Inverness with the Eastgate Centre, Debenham's clothes, that was devastating, wasn't it, to Inverness and to many of us who wanted to go and shop there too.

To Lloyd's Pharmacy, that closed on the high streets, isn't it, Banks, they're closing branches left, right and centre, Hospitality. I was in Ulpo a few times over the summer, there on my motorbike for a run out, and I was quite shocked when I parked up on Shore Street, how few cafes and restaurants there were, certainly the only part of the spring and summer, they've all closed.

And it tells us, we live in this very insecure age, don't we? And it's not unusual in such times that families, when they can't get work, will uproot and relocate.

Relocate to a better place where they can find employment, where they can make a living to survive and so on. In our own nation, the welfare state has existed for just over 75 years, I think.

And in some ways, maybe that sort of distorts things. You know, I think distorts, maybe you could argue, distorts the natural process. The natural process of people relocating when work has dried up.

[1 : 34] I know from my own family history, they were all farmers in Yorkshire, on my dad's side. And in the early part of the 20th century, there was a very dry period with strong winds, which caused dust storms.

And as a consequence, my family, they lost the harvest completely. And they lost their farm. There were tenants on that farm. They lost their farm, and they had to relocate. By the time I came along, about four brothers had farms, so they'd obviously re-established themselves on farms.

But that was, we're talking about the 1910s, 1920s when this happened. And in a way, that is what's happening here at the beginning of the Book of Ruth.

In the canon of Scripture, in the Bible, we find Ruth to start with the Book of Judges. However, it's thought that the events recorded in Ruth actually took place during the Judges period, just before the prophet Samuel and the start of Israel's monarchy.

The time of Judges proved to be a very dysfunctional period in Israel's history. It was a time when the nation increasingly turned away from God, turned away from Yahweh.

[2 : 47] By contrast, the Book of Ruth actually reads like a breath of fresh air. Essentially, it's a tragedy, but it's also a love story.

A love story which is connected with harvest. And it's also an essential part of the genealogy of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, here in Russia, harvest wasn't that long ago, was it? So it's a story nearly in season. Nearly in season. So who was Ruth? Well, she was a Moabite who marries the son of Naomi, a woman from Bethlehem.

Moab was a region to the southeast of the Dead Sea. And Moabites are originally descendants of Lot and his incestuous relationship with his eldest daughter.

The Moabites have always had a difficult history with Israel. But as you read the book, you will discover that Ruth plays a key role in the story of the future Messiah.

[3 : 52] Later on in the book, Ruth remarries a man called Boaz. Boaz becomes the father of Obed, who in turn becomes the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. David, the shepherd boy who leads a nation, becoming the hope of a nation for the coming Messiah, born in the line of David.

So Ruth and Boaz are very much in the bloodline of Jesus. But that's many generations later on. This man, Boaz, becomes Naomi's kinsman-redeemer in this book, Mary's Ruth.

Ultimately, Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer. And it all starts with a famine in Israel and a man from Bethlehem called Elimelech.

Maybe that famine was an indicator of the Lord's judgment upon a nation that was increasingly turning away from Yahweh, rejecting God's law during this period of judges. Elimelech decides to turn his back on his inheritance in Israel and settle in Moab, where I presume the land and the climate have did so much better at that point.

His wife is called Naomi and they have two sons, Marlon and Kilium. Shortly after settling in Moab, Elimelech dies.

[5 : 07] Marlon and Kilium take Moab's lives, Orpah and Ruth. But then after ten years, tragedy hits again. And both Naomi's sons, Marlon and Kilium, they also die.

It's a story of tremendous hardship, isn't it? And Naomi is far from a people in Judah with no husband and no sons and no grandchildren. They're moved to get away from the famine in Judah, but things have just gone from worse to worse to worse to worse.

Not better. Of course, Israel were a covenant people. They were a covenant people restored to the land by God after the Exodus. And they were not free to disinherit the land and go off and intermarry with other nations.

And the writer of Ruth, who is thought to be the prophet Samuel, wants us to understand that we can't just walk away from God. We can't just pick God up when it suits us and then drop Him.

Because there will be consequences. Israel had been chosen by God. They were His treasured possession.

[6 : 15] And the consequences turn out to be pretty dying in this book, don't we? A dead husband, two dead sons, no grandchildren, no inheritance, no one to look out for, and no future.

From Naomi's perspective, what is there to live for? What is there to look forward to? I'm sure in some way we can all maybe identify with similar circumstances.

Or identify with her deep grief. And her utter misery. So when she hears that God has come to the aid of His people back in Israel. And there's now food there.

Well naturally you can understand that she wants to return home, back to the people in Judah. Back to the Apatrophites who live in Bethlehem. There's a hint in the narrative so far that Naomi has some degree of faith.

Which her late husband, Illinric, clearly didn't seem to have. Initially she sets off on the road back to Judah with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. But then she realises that for Orpah and Ruth, Bethlehem is not their home.

[7 : 24] The Apatrophites are not Orpah and Ruth relatives. And so with compassion she says, go back home. Go back to your homes. Go back to your own families here in Boyle. They've clearly demonstrated great loyalty, haven't they?

Great love to their mother-in-law. Even after losing their husbands. And Naomi wants to wish them God's blessing in the hope that they can find another opportunity, another husband.

So they can enjoy a future, security, and maybe once again family. Something that Naomi has convinced herself they will never find staying with her.

Because she believes God has turned his hand against her. In verse 13. In ancient times, having a husband was key to future welfare, future provision, and security.

This then leads to a very emotional, almost heartbreaking moment, doesn't it? Both of these low-back women are in tears as Naomi kisses them. And they're saying, we'll go back with you.

[8 : 27] We'll come with you. We'll come with you to Judah. But this is now a tearing apart moment. A breaking up moment. What has now become a close family.

And naturally, it is difficult. Naomi insists that they stay with her. She's too old to find another husband. And supposing she did.

Would they seriously wait until any would-be male children were born and they would grow up to become future husbands? Of course, they wouldn't, would they? And so with that stark reality, Oprah realizes that, yes, this is a parting of the ways.

It makes sense, albeit very difficult. But Ruth clings to another Lord. She just grips another Lord. Will not leave. Naomi tries to insist. Oprah is doing the right thing.

She's going back to her family and her gods. Ruth, you must do the same. But Ruth is determined, isn't she? Verse 16. Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you.

[9 : 31] Where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried.

May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely. If anything but death, separate you and me. That sounds like more than just determination, doesn't it?

This is a promise. This goes beyond reason. And it comes from the heart, doesn't it? It's a genuine expression of selfless commitment and love.

Ruth's also saying that she has a faith. Her faith is in the God of Naomi's people, Yahweh. And so she's making a promise by him. Not by Moab's gods, as Naomi referred to a moment ago in verse 15.

But by Naomi's God, Yahweh. With such a statement, Naomi doesn't insist anymore, does she? But neither does it appear to bring any comfort to Naomi.

[10 : 37] Which tells us that Naomi really is in a very, very dark place. A place where people find themselves when they've been struck with really bad news.

Blow after blow after blow of bad news. Maybe the sudden death of a parent. Compounded by the news that your spouse has terminal cancer.

Further compounded by the news that one of your children's marriages is failing. It's not working out. We all know these life scenarios, don't we? The awful series of events.

The realistic everyday events that people have to try and cope with. And as often as not to cope with. Understandably. Ever since the fall of humanity at the beginning of creation.

The devil has continued to attempt and break what God created. And he seeks to do it through encouraging the lie. The lie that God doesn't really love us. That God isn't real.

[11 : 40] That God isn't here. That God doesn't exist. And often it appears to be having some success. Especially here in Scotland.

Where we learn that mental health and illness rates are soaring. And the NHS can't cope. It doesn't have the resources. Although it's not just isolated to Scotland.

It's actually a Western nations issue as well. Western health crisis. Scotland today is a society that's increasingly rejecting God. Turning away from God.

It's becoming what I call very secular. But as we move God out of the way. Generally people are replacing with something else.

Entertainment maybe. Sport. Shopping. Filling our lives with material things. In the hope that we will feel happy. That we will feel satisfied. Sunday may be a day of rest for many.

[12 : 41] But society is filled with many attractions. And many distractions. And it's. Don't get me wrong. I'm not here a legalist. It's not these things are individually bad in themselves.

But they don't fill our need. Do they? They don't really fill what I call our spiritual need. The God space that's inside each and every one of us. They don't fill the spiritual vacuum. That God has created.

And each and every one of us. And when you experience tough times. Tough. Really difficult times. Like Naomi. If God is not on your radar.

If you don't know the peace of God. The love of God. Through his son Jesus Christ. Then maybe. That goes some way. Into explain the rising. Mental health challenges.

That today's society. Is facing. In Naomi's situation. She had lost her husband. Then later. She loses her two sons.

[13 : 40] No grandchildren. No future. No hope. Her grief is palpable. Her misery. Understandable. I'm no expert. But my.

From my experience. In both life. And ministry. People are. Generally. Generally. Happier. When they're fulfilled. Through affirming. Loving. Relationships.

When their lives have purpose. And the most basic purpose. That God ordained. At the very beginning of creation. Was men and women. In families with children. I wholeheartedly believe.

That a stable. And loving society. Can only happen. When Jesus Christ. Is at the center. Of our lives. When Jesus Christ. Is at the center. Of our families.

Unfortunately. We are now living in an age. Where. Secular society. Has. Talked down. The central role. Of family. You'll find it.

[14 : 37] In popular politics. You'll find it. Certainly. In the media. And worryingly. I would argue. It's creeping into education. As well. But this isn't sustainable.

Society. Cannot be sustained. With the current narrative. Of playing down. The centrality. Of family. In fact. I would argue. That our government. Is now waking up. To that reality.

Because they realize. The birth rate. Is too low. Too low. To sustain. Our current population. Into the future. There will not be. Enough people. To support. The current generations. As we get older.

Taxpayers. Nurses. Doctors. Teachers. Engineers. Engineers. Council workers. Carers. Etc. How mad. Then. That there are. A cries. In our parliaments.

These days. In both parliaments. To extend. The abortion limits. To full term. That is not only mad. In my opinion. It's wicked. And it's criminal. Well.

[15 : 36] Naomi's situation. Was tragic. And depressing. A situation. That appeared. Without hope. I'm sure. For some of us. Here. This morning. We will have passed.

Through similar times. Such times. Of loss. Of misery. Where everything. Appeared. Hopeless. And it's into that. Very dark place. That Jesus.

Brings. His word. And the very core. Of the gospel. Is the hope. Of everything. Being renewed. Through his resurrection. As I draw.

To a conclusion. These two women. Naomi. And Ruth. Finally arrived. In Bethlehem. Imagine. 1300 years. Before the time. Of Jesus. Bethlehem. Would not be a large place.

Would it? So there's quite a buzz. About that. Small town. Can this be Naomi? They're asking. Rhetorically. But Naomi. Naomi. Isn't returning. With any great wealth.

[16 : 31] Is she? Or a clan. Or a flock. Of family. Sons. Grandchildren. Blocks of herds. Of animals. Supplies. Etc. No. She's returning.

Destitute. With a daughter-in-law. Who isn't even. A Jew. A daughter-in-law. Who is a widow. And she's possibly. Even barrow. In fact. Naomi.

Makes no reference. To Ruth. She says. Don't call me. Naomi. Because the name. Naomi. Means. Pleasant. Beautiful. And good. Instead. Call me. Mara. Which means.

Bitter. Because she says. The almighty. Has made my life. Very bitter. Suffering. Can have the effect.

Of either drawing us. Closer to God. In sheer. Desperation. When all else. Has failed. Or. It will. Increase. Our unbelief. And make us. More bitter. To the extent.

[17 : 24] That we become angry. When others mention God. Or mention Jesus. And the hope. Of the cross. And so on. And yet. Clearly. When all else. Has failed. Jesus. Is.

Our only hope. Isn't he? For Naomi and Ruth. The timing. Of their return. To Bethlehem. Is critical. Because they arrived. Just in time. For the barley harvest.

And. If you were to go on. And read on. In this book. In the following chapters. Of Ruth. The harvest plays. A key role. To the future. Of both Ruth. And Naomi. And what God. Will accomplish.

Through these two women. This story. Starts off. With Elimelech. Who failed to trust God. In this time of famine. He disobeyed God's. Revealed will. Of Israel. By moving to Moab.

And that flows. Tragedy. After tragedy. And yet. Into Naomi's. Difficult experience. Comes this. More like woman. Ruth. Who shows. Amazing character.

[18 : 21] Shows amazing. Love. And care. And the wonderful. Sovereignty of God. Not only does he. Bless Ruth. Through her gifts.

But God also. Leads these women. Back to Bethlehem. At this. Crucial time. Of harvest. It's a wonderful story. Of how we need. To learn. To trust God. In all circumstances.

That God really is. Working out his purposes. Even when. From our perspective. Everything appears to have gone. Terribly. Wrong. It's from such stories.

That we learn so much. About ourselves. About life itself. And how wonderfully practical. God really is.

Amen.