

God Works in Bad Times

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[0 : 00] If you joined us late, I want to welcome you to Kingdom Life Church's live stream Sunday morning service.! And if you've not subscribed to our YouTube channel, I encourage you to do so.

! And you may, if you think there is a family member or friends who might benefit from the message, which is God works in bad times.

I encourage you to message them and invite them to join us on the YouTube channel. On Tuesday past, I had to go to the airport to pick up my oldest daughter, who's the last family member to come in.

And she came in right before, well, she came in the very last flight that the Hamazia had before they shut down operations.

In light of the shutdown of the country to international flights and also moving through the Bahamas. And there was nothing that could have prepared me for what I was going to see at the airport.

[1 : 15] When I went to the airport, the airport was deserted beyond imagination. I couldn't believe the airport was like that.

I had seen the airport during the September 11th terrorist attacks and the impact that had on our country. When I drove into the airport's compound, I saw no taxis, no tour buses.

I saw no long lines of cars parking on the side and guards telling them to move. No groups of people waiting. I saw about 10 cars.

There was one young lady waiting outside. And as I sat there waiting for my daughter to come out and began to absorb the reality of all of that, I realized that there were tens of thousands of lives that were affected by people not being at work as they normally would be.

And I was just heartbroken. Even this morning as I think about it, my heart breaks because I realize what the impact of that means for our country.

[2 : 35] The reality is that our country is headed for what can only be described as financial bad times. Our economy is driven by tourism.

And 82% of our tourists come from the United States. And many of you would be aware that the United States now is the new epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic.

They have now surpassed all other countries in infections. And so the reality is that for quite some time now, cruise ships are not going to be cruising to our seaports.

And airplanes are not going to be flying into our airports from the United States bringing us tourists. And from what they're saying, we have a good number of months to weather this through.

And even after that, we will continue to live with the fallout. And really what it means is that we are headed for bad times. And the question that I believe that we all need to consider this morning is how are we going to respond to that?

[3 : 51] And the question I want to ask you individually is how do you live in bad times? The reality is that generally speaking, we don't live well in bad times.

And that includes some who belong to Christ. And one of the main reasons that we don't live well in bad times is that we forget this very important truth.

That God works in bad times. And this morning I want us to consider the account of a man by the name of Elimelech who faced a very bad time.

This account is found in the book of Ruth chapter 1 verses 1 through 5. And in our remaining time this morning, I want to consider how Elimelech responded to his bad time.

And my hope is that we who are headed for bad times or who are already in bad times because the bad times have begun to set in on our country will know how to respond as we hear God's word this morning.

[5 : 06] So if you would turn in your Bible to the book of Ruth chapter 1 and I will begin reading in verse 1 through verse 5.

I'm reading from the English Standard Version. So if you have another translation, it will read slightly differently. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

And a man of Bethlehem in 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 Kilion. 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.

[6 : 22] They took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah. And the name of the other was Ruth. They lived there about ten years.

And both Malon and Kilion died. So that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Would you bow in prayer with me?

Father, we are grateful this morning that we are able, despite our limitations of not being able to gather this morning, we're able to still be together electronically and to hear your word proclaimed.

And Father, I pray that you would use your word to speak to our hearts. Lord, as best as we can see, our nation is headed for bad financial times.

And perhaps they're even going to be worse than I am able to see and others are able to see. Lord, the most important thing that we need in this moment is to hear from you.

[7 : 41] Would you speak to our hearts? You know us individually, and you know what we need.

And I pray that from this single message, you will speak to all of our hearts in ways that we need to hear from you and in ways that only you can.

So Father, we commit ourselves to you now. I pray for your grace to enable me to be faithful, to speak your word and care for your people.

And this time, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let me give a quick overview of the book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth has seven named characters. And in these five verses that we just read, we are introduced to six of them.

And by the end of these five verses, three of the main characters have died and three are left. And then by the end of this chapter, of the three that are left, one disappears off the scene, that's Orpah, and the other two characters left are Ruth and Naomi.

[9 : 00] And then in chapter two, we are introduced to another character whose name is Boaz. But the book of Ruth is about another character as well.

But this character is not named. And he is actually the main character in the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth is really about God.

And that's very easy to miss. And if we miss that, if we miss the main character of the book, we will miss the message of the book. God is the main character in the book of Ruth.

And what we find in these five verses of the book of Ruth is we find a description of some severe circumstances that was faced by this man, Elimelech, and his family.

They were facing bad times. And when we consider this account this morning, here's the main point I want us to see.

[10 : 03] This is the main lesson I want us to learn. God works in bad times because he is sovereignly at work at all times.

And so I want us to see, that is what I want us to learn. God works in bad times because he is sovereignly at work at all times.

And I pray that we would remember this as we go through the bad times that are upon us and even bad times that will be beyond this particular season.

Now I want us to look at this man, Elimelech, and I want us to consider, first, the circumstances that Elimelech faced. Second, I want us to evaluate the choices that Elimelech made.

And then third, I want us to ponder the consequences that Elimelech reaped. So let's begin to consider these in order. First, Elimelech's circumstances.

[11 : 11] Elimelech faced two circumstances and they're laid out for us in verse one. The first one is the author of the book of Ruth tells us that Elimelech lived in a spiritually dark and dangerous time.

It was the time of the judges. It was a period of some 350 years. So this was a very extended period of time. It commenced from the death of Joshua through the end of the ministry of Samuel, right before Saul was anointed the first king of Israel.

So you can imagine this 350 year period of time, how entrenched the spiritual darkness and danger had become. A very good indication of how dark things were at that time is seen in verse 25 of the book of Judges, chapter 21, the very last verse in the book of Judges, right before the book of Ruth. This is what it says, everyone, it says, in those days, Israel had no king, everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

That was the situation. Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That was the description of their spiritual state.

[12:38] And so the book of Ruth comes right after the book of Judges. So if you were reading it in sequence, you would read, in those days, there was no king in Israel.

everyone did what was right in his own eyes and then you would come to the book of Ruth and you would see in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

It was a very difficult time. Those of you who are familiar with the book of Ruth, sorry, the book of Judges, would know that some of the most heinous things are recorded in the book of Judges.

They help us to see how dangerous and dark that time was. For example, there was child sacrifice in the name of the Lord. There's one account of a priest who is supposed to be God's priest who is presiding over an idol temple.

There's another story about a priest who takes a concubine as his wife, something that was forbidden and on one occasion when his life was threatened by some homosexuals who wanted to rape him, this priest gives his concubine to this group of homosexual men and it's recorded in the book of Judges starting in chapter 19 where this man gave his wife, his concubine wife to these homosexuals and they abused her sexually all night so much that she died the next morning.

[14:12] And this man takes her body and he cuts the body in 12 parts and he sends one part to each of the 12 tribes. You can read this account. It's the very last account in the book of Judges from chapters 19 through 21.

It was a very dark and dangerous time in which Elimelech lived. But not only was it spiritually dark and dangerous, it was also a time that was materially dry and destitute.

We're told in verse 1 that there was a famine in the land. Food was scarce. And although these two circumstances may just seem unrelated, spiritual darkness and material dryness, they're not unrelated.

They are very much related. Because properly understood in the book of Judges, the famine was part of God's judgment against the land where everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. What you find in the book of Judges is this repeated cycle where the people would turn away from God. God would turn them over to their enemies. The enemies would oppress them.

[15:25] They would cry out to God and God would mercifully raise up a judge. The judge would deliver them. They would serve God during the time of the judge and when the judge would die, they would go right back to idols and not serving the Lord and the cycle would begin again because God would give them over to their enemies.

The enemies would oppress them and the cycle would just continue. And so part of the famine that God brought onto the land was to get their attention, to bring them to repentance.

repentance. And I pause to say that God does the same thing today. And I say to us, speaking about us in the Bahamas, I believe that God is seeking to get our attention.

We think of the devastating effects of Hurricane Dorian that, as far as I'm aware, impacted this nation more than any other. And now we're faced with the coronavirus pandemic and although our numbers are low in terms of infection, the effect on our economy is exponential.

I believe that God wants to get our attention. And he doesn't want to get our attention in some kind of cosmetic way, in some kind of lip service where he wants our attention to bring us to repentance.

[16:51] Not necessarily the whole nation, but enough people that it could be said that this nation has looked to God and turned back to God and repented of sin.

Now I know this is hard for some people to accept. They find it hard to believe that God would do that. They would say, why would God bring a hurricane our way?

Why would God be behind the coronavirus? And the only reason that people speak that way is they don't know the God of the Bible. They ignore the plain words of scripture that help us to know who

he is.

And so they say God will never do that. And they blame it on the devil and they go about doing all manner of unbiblical things saying it's from the devil.

But listen to one particular scripture that helps us to see that these events that happen are ultimately from the Lord.

[17 : 56] Here's what it says in Amos chapter 3. If you look at Amos chapter 3 from verses 3 through 6, in those two verses, verses 3 to 6, the Lord asks seven questions.

And each one of those questions is a yes-no question and the obvious answer to each one of them is no. The answer is no.

It's not yes, the answer is no. And the very last question that the Lord asks is this, does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?

Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? Friends, we can spin that any way that we want. It's spin right back to the truth.

Does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it? And the answer to that question like the answer to all the other questions, the six of them, is no. Yet some people refuse to accept the plain truth that God does bring disaster for his own purposes and just because we can't understand that we must not dismiss what scripture clearly and plainly teaches.

[19 : 16] Well, those were the circumstances that Elimelech faced. They were spiritually dark and dangerous and they were materially dry and destitute. And so what did Elimelech do?

What did he do? This brings me to my second point, Elimelech's choices. We've considered his circumstances, let's consider now his choices. The sad truth is Elimelech didn't respond as God wanted him to.

In verse one we're told that Elimelech responded to his circumstances by leaving Bethlehem and taking his wife and his two sons to live a while in the country of Moab.

The Moabites were near relatives of the Israelites. They were descendants of Moab. and Moab was conceived through an incestuous encounter between Lot and his oldest daughter.

The nation of Moab were pagans. They worshipped false gods. Elimelech would have known this. Elimelech was not going to Moab and finding out, oh, they worshipped false gods.

[20 : 27] He knew that the place that he was going, they worshipped false gods and yet, Elimelech made a conscious choice to go to that country.

Elimelech would have known that it would have been harder for him and his family to serve God in Moab than in Bethlehem, but he decided that he was going there anyway. Why?

Because we're told in the days of the judges, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. when we consider Elimelech, we see two very interesting contradictions in his life.

Elimelech is living in this place called Bethlehem, which means house of bread, but there's a famine in the land, there's no bread. And so he's facing this contradiction.

It's almost as if the circumstances of his life are mocking him and he basically says, I'm out of here, I'm going to find my own bread. God brought the famine to the land to spur the people to repent, to spur the people to cry out to him and to turn away from their wickedness.

[21 : 44] Elimelech's response was, I'm for that. I'm going to go and make my own bread. Another contradiction in Elimelech's life is his name means God is my king.

It's the name that Elimelech carried and in that particular culture because they would have understood the meanings of names that were given. When someone would say Elimelech, they would be saying God is my king.

When he would say my name is Elimelech, he would be saying God is my king. But when faced with famine, instead of staying in the promised land of Bethlehem and trusting Elimelech says I'm my own king.

I'll make my own way. I'll provide my own bread. And I think it's important for us to see that as a Jew, moving to Moab, a pagan land, was not a small decision for Elimelech.

It couldn't have been. It was a big decision. It was a compromising decision. And I think when we look beneath it all, we would say that the Elimelech moved for financial reasons.

[23 : 05] He no doubt thought, hey, I could make it better in Moab. I can get a job. I can care for my wife and my children and for myself. He heard that things were better in Moab.

And so he went there. And it's so easy to justify it. It's easy to justify it because he's saying, well, I have to take care of my family. And you know, we're not different from Elimelech.

We are really no different. We are very much the same in the sense that in the midst of bad times, we are tempted in the very same way.

We're tempted to doing whatever we feel we need to do in order to obtain finances that we believe we need to care for ourselves and our families. And for most of us, this temptation is not resorting to stealing or committing some other crime.

Although for some, it is that. But for most of us, like Elimelech, it's just living as our own king, doing our own thing, doing whatever we feel we need to do and we compromise.

[24 : 24] Not illegal, but sinful, because we compromise. And just like Elimelech, Elimelech never planned to stay in Moab.

He went there, we're told in verse 1, to sojourn in the land. Sojourn means to stay a little while. He didn't go there to stay, but we see that he remained there.

We're told in verse 2 that he and his family, they remained in Moab. Elimelech also made a choice about his children.

I'm sure if somebody were to stop Elimelech and interview him and say, why are you doing what you're doing? Why are you going to Moab? Why are you leaving Bethlehem? He probably said, I'm doing it for the children.

I'm doing it because I want them to have a better way of life. Things are too hard in Bethlehem. Things are going to be better for them in Moab. And yet, Elimelech disregarded the true wealthier of his two sons.

[25 : 37] He disregarded how fragile they were. And evidently, Elimelech knew because he would have given his sons their names at birth. and he gave them two particular names that indicate that they were weak.

He named his first son Malon and in the original language it means sickly. And he named the second one Kilion, which means wasting. Evidently, he maybe had some kind of a very visible condition that was physically affecting his body.

And so these boys were in some way weak children, very vulnerable children, and yet Elimelech still took them to a foreign pagan land in search of more bread, because he refused to acknowledge God in the bad time of famine, and cry out to God for mercy, and put his trust in him.

Friends, we are already in bad times, and the question is, how are you going to respond?

And I especially ask this question to those of you who profess to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, that he is your king.

[27 : 05] Will you make choices that are reflective of the fact that Jesus is indeed your Lord and your king, or will you be like Elimelech whose choices show that he is his own Lord and his own king?

Will you make choices that take into consideration the effect of them on your life spiritually, or will you have no regard for the spiritual effect your decisions would have on your life and indeed on your family?

family. And this may come in all different forms. It may be considering taking a particular job or moving to another country. It may involve getting involved in a particular relationship.

Would you consider the implications on your life spiritually? Would you consider the implications on your children's life if God has entrusted you with children?

Friends, we must think about these things. And if God is our king, the choices we make must reflect that truth. And then third and finally, having considered the circumstances Elimelech faced and just evaluated the choices that he made, I want us now to consider the consequences Elimelech reaped.

[28 : 30] Elimelech's consequences, my third and final point. things didn't go the way Elimelech planned it. He reaped some consequences that he never envisioned.

First of all, after some time, he died. His sons were left with their mother and faced with the choice of returning to Bethlehem or staying in Moab.

Interestingly, they stayed. Elimelech lost his sons spiritually because both of them married Moabite women, showing that they were identifying more with the pagan people and the pagan land than their own people and the promised land.

The decision shows that like their father, they were doing what was right in their own eyes. And then after about ten years in Moab, both Malon and Kilion died, and Naomi was left all alone.

Her husband and her sons were dead. In verse 6, the author tells us that Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem because she heard that God had been good to his people and visited his people and given them food.

[29 : 56] And so she returned to Bethlehem with her daughter in-law Ruth, who unlike the other daughter-in-law Orpah, Ruth refused to leave Naomi's side.

Would you look at verses 19 through 21? I want to read those. This is the return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem.

And it reads, 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 woman said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Marah, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

I went away full and the Lord brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

[31 : 09] So here we see that apart from being dead himself, apart from his son's being dead, Elimelech's choices, led to a bitter wife who is now a widow.

It's quite interesting how the grass always seems greener on the other side, especially in bad times. In bad times, it seems like the greenness of the grass is in high definition.

And really, when we are disobeying God in bad times, it is because of what the songwriter Augustus Toplady explains so well in his song.

God moves in a mysterious way. He writes this line, blind unbelief is sure to err. Blind unbelief is sure to err. And that's what happened with Elimelech and the choice that he made to go into Moab. Friends, if we are not trusting God in the midst of our bad times, blind unbelief will cause us to err. Blind unbelief will cause us to think that we can make decisions on our own and that they will turn out to be good.

[32 : 42] But God works in bad times because he is sovereignly at work at all times. And as dark as this time was, God was at work.

God was at work in the midst of it all. The book of Judges, the book of Ruth's story begins with this despairing reference to the time of the judges when there was no king and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

That's the way the book began. But at the end of the book we're able to see that God was at work in an incredible way in this time not just for that time but for all time.

God was working out eternal! redemptive purposes in the midst of the bad time. Shaking and showing even his grace in the midst of all that was going on.

We hear the testimony of Naomi where she says God has dealt bitterly with me. He has been hard on me. He has returned me empty. That's not true. God was kind to Naomi.

[33 : 54] God showed her grace. There is no reason why Naomi should not have been dead just like her husband Elimelech. She it was her responsibility to go back but she stayed.

And truth is that there's no reason why Naomi should not have been dead just like her husband just like her sons but God gave her grace. God gave her amazing grace.

The book of Ruth ends with what seems to be just some details that are details in passing. At the end of the book of Ruth we're told that Ruth marries this man by the name of Boaz and they had a child by the name of Obed and Obed had a son by the name of Jesse and Jesse had a son by the name of David and the last word in the book of Ruth is the word David pointing to Israel's redeemer king who would restore the nation he would be God's king who would restore the nation back to God and so we see this dark period of time that begins with the time of the judges it begins with this man doing his own thing and it ends with David and is pointing to a brighter future and is pointing to the fact that

God was at work in this dark time bringing his purposes to pass so what we see in these concluding verses in chapter four of the book of Ruth is this record of a baby being born this baby by the name of Obed and through his offspring God would bring the redeemer king in the person of David but the baby born in Bethlehem in the days of the judges pointed to another baby who would be born in Bethlehem in the days of the Romans again at another bad time when the world laid in darkness and rebellion to its creator but unlike the baby born in the time of the judges this other baby was the redeemer king who did not just point to the redeemer king he was the redeemer king my prayer is that we would all look to this one this ultimate redeemer to whom

David points this redeemer that God was at work at that time using even this pagan Ruth who would come out of Moab and using her in the lineage of Christ reminding us that in the bad times God is sovereignly at work God is doing things that we cannot see and so I want to encourage us as we think about navigating these bad times that we're in no doubt some of you who are listening you've already lost your job or your job may be in jeopardy and you may be thinking what am I going to do it seems like the Moab of today is Canada everybody I want to go to Canada I'm going to move to Canada and I would say to you don't be like a limelack don't just make your decision without regard for the implications of that decision don't just assume that you can make decisions and it's all going to work out you belong to

[38 : 02] Christ trust him you belong to Christ wait and if he says go to Canada but go to Canada but don't just assume I'm going to go there because I heard things are better there or wherever it might be that you may be considering it is in our bad times that we are most tempted to compromise and it is in our bad times where more!

we need to be looking to Christ calling on his name repenting where we need to repent and draw near to God so that he would draw near to us and he would speak to us and guide us and direct us as only he can and so friends may we all remember that God is at work in the bad times because he is sovereignly at work at all times let's pray together father thank you for your word this morning I ask that you would use it to speak to the hearts of all who would hear it help us to remember that you're not limited by bad times indeed you are at work in them we pray these things in Jesus name amen