

Living in the Time of "Judges"

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Date: 07 March 2021

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[0 : 00] One of the greatest movie masterpieces that I have ever seen is the Pixar Disney movie Up.

Yes, an animated movie. One of the things that I thought was so absolutely brilliant about the movie Up, and the first time I saw it, I really didn't like the movie.

And the reason was I missed the beginning. If you know the story of Up, and I'm not going to give it too much away, but in the very beginning sequence, it tells the story of a young man meets a young girl, and they live their life, they grow up just through a series of short pictures, and you get and understand all their life in a matter of minutes.

And because you understand their life, you understand the motivation of the main character throughout the rest of the movie.

Without understanding the beginning, you are lost throughout the rest of the movie. This book of Ruth is essentially the same thing.

[1 : 35] If we do not understand the first five verses of this incredible story, the rest is lessened.

It becomes meaningless. Like a movie director who is able to set the scene, to stir the emotions, to allow us to enter into his work of art, so does this writer of Ruth.

A good movie director sets us up for comfort, for distress, for joy. So does the writer of Ruth. Using these spirit-empowered words, the writer crafts a story that many of us, at some degree, are able to relate to at some level.

The story of Ruth begins as an absolute tragedy. Although we may not be able to relate to the particular details of the tragedy, I believe we as human beings can understand the roots that led to the tragic effects that we are going to read.

And many of us have experienced those roots in our own lives at one time or another. In fact, some of you, maybe even many of you, may be experiencing a similar type of tragedy in your own life.

[3 : 22] So let's get back to these words, and I want to read the first five verses again. And I want to be able to take some time this morning answering some of the most pertinent questions that will help us better understand this incredible letter, this book.

Starting in verse 1, 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 Chilion. They were Ephratis 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 for about ten years, and both Malon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[4 : 36] What a tragic story. Begins by telling us the story of this woman, Naomi, who is left with nothing.

But before we concentrate on Naomi, I want us to look at the who, what, where, when, why events of this passage of Scripture.

The first thing that I want you to pay attention to, which informs our understanding, is the when. Notice, verse 1 begins, in the days when the judges ruled.

We understand that this is before the monarchy. There is a time when the judges ruled, and the Bible contains many of the details of the judges in the book of Judges.

And I want to read you a section from Judges 2, verses 10 to 19, which will give us much color and understanding into the events that are happening here in the book of Ruth.

[5 : 55] Beginning in verse 10, Judges chapter 2, and all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And remember, the generation came after being saved from, by Moses, by God, in the Exodus.

They spent that generation in the wilderness. And then God, because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness, allowed them to die off, and a new generation entered into the promised land.

And he's talking about this first generation. And he's talking about, and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

Now, if you remember, in Judges 1, they're supposed to be telling their children about God. The parents are supposed to be relaying this information to the next generation about everything that God had done in taking his people out of Israel or out of Egypt into Judah, the promised land.

That they were never to forget these great and mighty works that God did, parting the Red Sea, the judgments against Pharaoh and those who stood against God.

[7 : 14] And God would even command them to build monuments as they would go about promises that God delivered to his people. But they didn't.

In verse 11, remember, remember, the Baals were the false gods that the Canaanites had as they went into the land.

They were supposed to destroy all those civilizations and those false gods. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them and they provoked the Lord to anger. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them.

Then the Lord God raised up judges who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet, they did not listen to their judges for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them.

[8 : 32] They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and he saved them from the hand of the enemies all the days of the judge.

For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. What a heart-breaking time for Israel.

Just caught up in disobedience, rebelliousness. One author simply states, in the days when the Lord's people forsook the Lord, rebelled against his rule, each man doing as he saw fit, suffered the consequences and needed a rescuer.

Every single time Israel would get themselves in such a predicament, there was no possible way for them to come out. that they, in fact, in every instance needed a rescuer.

[10:10] So that is the time when this book is written. These are the events unfolding within this time frame. Then we read this statement of the why.

There was a famine in the land of Judah. Now, there is significance to this understanding that there is a famine. Leviticus 26, 3 tells us, If you walk in my statutes, this is God talking, and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

You shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. I will turn to you and make you faithful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you.

And I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. Verse 14, But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you.

And you shall sow your seed in vain, and your strength shall be spent in vain. For your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

[11:55] So the events of Ruth take place when it is a rebellious, wicked time. And that rebelliousness has led to a direct cause for the famine.

God has pulled his hand of blessing to me. There is a reason there is no food in the land. It's because there's mass disobedience. We just read, they will not listen to him.

They will not do his commandments. They spurned his statutes. They abhorred his rules. They broke his covenant. And therefore, their land will not produce food.

So this is the setting that leads to a tragic decision by Elimelech, the husband of Naomi.

He chooses not to believe God. The first decision that is made that leads to this tragedy for the man of Bethlehem is that he chooses not to believe God.

[13:12] You see, that is the choice we make in every act of sin. Anytime we sin, we are telling God, I don't believe you.

I do not believe your promises. I do not believe you're good. I do not believe you know what's best for me. That's what sin at the root of its core is.

It's a failure to believe God. And we're going to see as they're living in a time where God's warnings are as sure as his promises.

God's warnings are as sure as his promises. The reality for us is that you and I do not need to live in Judah experiencing a famine to understand how right these words are.

There is actual punishment for forsaking and ignoring God. That God has given his statutes his commandments his rules he's made his covenant with us as God's chosen people for a reason.

[14:30] The reality is God hates sin. God hates sin so much that he will break us in order to break us of our sin and he will break us to bring him bring us back to him.

There's a word for this it's called love. My friends if you are a believer in Jesus Christ if you call yourself a Christian if you at one point had made that decision to follow Jesus and you are willingly sinning you are hiding sin away.

Galatians 6:9 Paul tells us do not be see God is not mocked for whatever one sows then he will also reap for the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption the one who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not give up friends we all know people whose lives who've been devastated by sin we know there are people's lives who have willingly chosen not to obey and we seen that God gave them over to their heart's desires and it was not good if God has judged you and dealt harshly with you you need to understand if you have experienced his anger it was not done unjustly

God has every right to punish sin in fact God's warnings are themselves amazing acts of kindness and patience of God calling people to repent if there's anything we need to take away from Ruth verse one is that the Lord's warnings are real and his punishment is no empty threat so Elimelech makes a choice and we're going to see how more that choice is out that he's not trusting God the second decision that he makes is that he compromises he compromises verse one and two and a man of

Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab his wife and his sons but what's really interesting is at the end they were it says they were Aphrodites from Bethlehem to Judah they went into the country of Moab and remained there there is a famine in the land of Judah so he made this decision it sounds all well and good I'm going to take my people to go to Moab because I understand there's food over there so isn't that a good thing that sounds really good right so we're just going to go for a short time but the text says that he although he went with the intention of sojourning visiting he actually remained there now a couple of things that we learn in these verses one his name is Elimelech the man from Bethlehem and we know Bethlehem to be an incredible prominent town in the history of Israel not only is it the city of

[18:40] David but it's the city where Christ is from Elimelech knew that since there was no food in Judah it must be a good idea to go to Moab well let me tell you something about Moab and the people who live in Moab the Moabites actually began because one of Noah's or Lot and his had a incestuous relationship with his older daughter and that birthed the new people from Moab so they were completely sired in sin absolute wretched sin and it says that they worship the Lord a God named Camos if you remember do you remember the story in the Bible about Balaam and his talking donkey that was actually assigned to him by King

Balak who was a Moabite who was attempting to curse Israel in fact throughout all of the history and even in this story the Moabite women had been a stumbling block to Israel in the wilderness seducing them to sexual immorality and to worship false gods what's interesting is that when they settled into the promised land they were commanded to not make a treaty of friendship with the Moabites so these people are a disgrace people in every aspect Israel is to have nothing to do with them they're completely wretched people that God does not want his people to do anything so here you have a Limelech making a decision I need to feed my kids my family it's a great decision but is

Moab the answer so like I said he says well I'm only going to go over there for a short time we're going to sojourn we're just going to visit we're going to take advantage of the land but instead the land takes advantage of them and they become dwellers of the land I think it's easy for us to ask the man is in dire straits it's a dire situation could his decision be a wise one but we've just learned that the famine is a God caused famine it is judgment judgment and when we're experiencing judgment from God even let's even use the word discipline from

God training from God we've been referring to Hebrews 12 for the last several years that that discipline is done in love and the way to respond to sin against God is to confess to repent pray and cry out for mercy but we don't see that we see Elimelech making a decision to go in a land that worshiped false gods to go into a land that cursed his people to go into the land where people had been a stumbling block to faith to go into the land where God said do not make friends with these people reality is we see this all the time in the church we see many Christians making friends with the world whether it be business partnerships we see marriages we try some way to be involved with the world to some extent well we're just going to be there for a short time we're really not going to let that sin or stain of the world's thinking affect us but as we all know some of us have gone away and have chosen to remain in the world that they have turned their back on

God and thus the church you see that's the killer thing about compromise we always think we can compromise with temptation we think we can control it it's just a little well I'm into this relationship because I'm lonely I have needs feel the need to have children the reality is we do not cry out to God and sometimes we don't want to because we don't want to bother God doesn't God say God helps those who help themselves maybe God just wants me to try harder the reality is the Bible is full of stories of people like you and me becoming impatient with God and here's the thing guys some of the people who are impatient with

[24 : 26] God and didn't trust God are recorded in Hebrews chapter 11 the great chapter of faith that even in the dire circumstances faith waned remember Abraham he was told that his wife Sarah would bear a child and would become God's nation but he became impatient chose to sleep with their handmaiden who bore him a son and the effects of that are wars that are waging to this very day in the Middle East Jacob and Esau Jacob was blessed but yet his mother and him tried to overtake Esau's blessing in the most unscrupulous manner tried to trick their father because they became impatient they ceased to trust

God so easy to forget that God is there isn't it so here's Elimelech with this decision before him and for whatever reason he thought it better to live in a forbidden land more inviting to him than the promised land and this compromise led to them staying there how are we to understand compromise why do we compromise the third decision that adds to tragedy is that Elimelech actually chooses to become a fool he becomes a fool now you might be asking what kind of person chooses to become a fool well first let me define for you what the

Bible calls a fool a fool believes that there is no other perspective no insight no theory no teaching or truth more reliable than his or hers alright they know better the fool always knows best it buys the idea that he or she knows better and what happens is even when everything in life is not aligning right they are twisted and they distort reality and tend to live in worlds of their own making it's as if they're living life in the carnival mirrors and you know what mirrors I'm talking about there's those mirrors that make you look thin make you feel good about yourself then there's those other ones make you look all round and distorted that's the world they live in but they're convinced they just find the right mirror right you see foolishness controls the man or woman who is open to nobody's counsel but their own this is the person who feels very little need to study

God's word the reality is a limelight should have known God's word there is no excuse for him not knowing the promises the instructions the rules the statutes that God laid out for his people not only was he supposed to know him for himself but he was supposed to teach them to his sons there's nowhere in the text that he sought any advice from any other judge or ruler at the time any friends hey this is an idea that I'm floating man what do you think you see foolishness convinces us that we are okay that our rebellious irrational choices are the best and right choices to make you see foolishness is the absolute rejection of our basic nature as human beings and that is you and

I were never created to be our own source of wisdom from the very beginning when God created us we were to always rely on God always rely on God we were designed to be revelation receivers receivers we've always been designed to be dependent on God's truth for living see the reality is if you think you can go on being a strong Christian and not being committed to knowing God's word God's word calls you a fool you can say that you believe it all day but if you do not read it you do not study it you do not apply it I guarantee at some point in your life you will be like a limelight you will make disastrous decisions and you're going to see those disastrous decisions that you make affect others that you're in charge of responsible for in authority listen up fathers husbands a limelight is the perfect example of a husband a father who does not seek after God's will and we're going to see the destruction that it rains on his wife and on his children you see we are created to base our interpretations and choices on God's wisdom not our wisdom in fact

[30 : 49] Paul tells us in Romans 1 that when we choose to ignore God we're actually storing up God's wrath against us that sometimes you might think you avoided that bullet or that situation or that consequence it's still coming it's still coming you see when we're foolish when we compromise we're rejecting God what we're really saying is we want to replace God with us beneath it all we want to be God we want to be the decision makers we want to be the one who determined the future and what's going to happen if you're unsure if you're a fool I give you a challenge this month for 31 days read the book of

Proverbs read the book of Proverbs one chapter there's 31 chapters in Proverbs read one a day it is convicting it will demonstrate the areas that you are not giving over to God I pray it will be like a clean bath a wonderful mountain shower to purge you of your foolishness now let's continue to look at the results of Elimelech's foolish decisions and how it affects others verse 3 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 truth they lived about 10 years see there's a switching in this verse

Elimelech the prime character at the beginning now makes Naomi the prime character because he chose to dwell in the land the sons having no choice of being a part of the land a custom the land take on foreign wives which was absolutely against God's word I am betting that Naomi is feeling pretty lost without her husband but even here now does she decide to go home no she doesn't why because her husband has modeled compromise for her so in the story she actually blesses the sons unions the sons would have come to her mom there's these two there's this woman over here that loves me the other son there's this other woman what do you think she said yes to women that they were forbidden to marry and not only that she continued to live there for ten more years so true isn't it how bad decisions can lead to more bad decisions and can lead to more bad decisions deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole we go well

I'm in Moab I might as well marry a Moabite woman I think we see the pain of this when we've seen our sons and daughters marrying unbelievers and the tragic consequences that it has in our families what's really odd being my age this week as you know I celebrated my 53rd birthday I've lived long enough now to see the tragic consequences of my friends who I begged them not to marry the women they were going to marry one friend defriended me quite early he was one of my very first best friends when I grew up he chose to marry a non-Christian well she knows about God she's pro-God 15 years later I got the call please help me my wife is leaving me sadly that's not the only time I've ever gotten that type of phone call no I don't say

I told you so but the more tragic decision is sometimes when someone comes to you understanding that and goes on to make foolish decisions again why why does that happen well the fourth choice that we see or the fourth situation word whatever you want to use is that we see in this tragedy is pride when we've gone down that hole so deep pride takes over shame takes over we don't ask for help we try to save ourselves even though every decision we've made has led us to that point we somehow think we can get ourselves out of that problem see that's the thing that Satan does he keeps us in shame keeps us thinking that if we buy the lottery ticket we will all of a sudden get out of the poor decisions that we've made financially we actually hate the thought of having to admit that our previous choices were wrong that they were rebellious they were sinful and somehow we make these decisions to take this pain and continue in this emptiness rather than confess our pursuit of fullness in the wrong things another tragic story a buddy of mine he's the baby of the family gets married decides right out of the bat they're going to buy a big house like the one he grew up in it was a nice house well the financial stress could have been saved his marriage could have been saved if they would have declared bankruptcy no no no we don't want to do that we're going to take on the two jobs wife taking on two jobs listen we know what their recipe is it's a disaster they divorced kids don't talk to them they don't even know them the stories

[37 : 26] I'm telling you are by professing believers in Jesus Christ and when we try to bring wisdom against them this no no no I got it I got it they feel like those in debt they have to live to a certain style what would people think if I lived in a lesser house or drove a used car they fear man more than they fear God let's move along to verse 5 both Malon and Chilean died so the woman was left without her two sons and her husband notice it uses the word woman and it doesn't call her Naomi who's going to care for her she has no family she has no hope for remarriage she's beyond her childbearing years she cannot support herself with a trade and in fact she had what is considered the worst fate that any Israelite woman could ever be have it is an aged widow without children in the eyes of man it is a position of complete shame what can she do if only

God somehow would come and rescue her and that's where we're going to leave this sermon off we're going to learn very quickly that she does no longer wants to be the fool is there anyone here who is tired of being the fool is there anyone here who's tired of trying to become an even greater fool perhaps you feel like you have no outs Naomi has nothing nothing but as we're going to learn in verse six she's going to make a decision she's going to make a decision to go back to God maybe that's a decision that you need to make now you need to confess your foolishness confess your pride confess your sin and you need to repent of it that means turning your back tearing up the pictures throwing out the computer getting rid of relationships settling up your debt calling someone and asking them to forgive you because of your selfishness your sin not waiting for them to call you and ask you for your forgiveness forgiveness maybe it's time to cry out for God and allow

God to rescue you pray with me dear Lord heavenly father I know what it is to be a fool there's times where I have spurned your wisdom chosen my wisdom I thought I was special that I would be impervious to sin pervious to temptation because of how strong my faith is thank you for your blessedness and mercy I can testify that it all began being restored with you was a cry out for mercy that I needed you to rescue me my plans weren't going to rescue me my wisdom was certainly was not going to rescue me but it began by crying out to you making a decision to do what was right and allow you to take care of the consequences often we imagine what false consequences will happen when we follow you but the reality is your statutes your law your rules are all loving kindness towards us the wisdom that you talk about in proverbs is blessings to us father I know you want to hear the lips from the lips of those here please help me God please forgive me

God I confess my foolishness father I pray that there's people here listening to the message would do so may you restore them we're going to see this incredible story of you this book of Ruth ironically enough is really not about Ruth it's almost more about Naomi but ultimately the main character is you father I pray that we would allow you to be the director of our lives you're the one who ultimately controls the consequences the decisions father I ask that you would have mercy on those who are crying out for you today

I ask that you would show them clearly your hand of mercy your hand of grace reality is we are all fools without you we all want to make things up in our own way it doesn't matter how smart we are educated we are the Bible never defines foolishness or being a fool or being wise as a level of education but simply are we willing to trust God and do what he calls us to do father give us ears to hear eyes to see and a mind to understand your glorious truths break our pride break us of our sin call us back home to you your most holy precious and everlasting name amen great great lad■■ k k o

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