

The Rough Road of Spiritual Growth

Communion

Book of Ruth – February 7, 2010

➤ **Lessons Learned from Naomi's** _____

Ruth 1:1-2

God's will for His chosen people – Psalm 37:3

II Corinthians 4:17

Hebrews 12:6

I Corinthians 11:32

Ruth 1:20-21

Life is _____ but the _____ is yet to come.

Psalm 119:67, 71

➤ **Lessons Learned from Ruth's** _____

Ruth 1:16-18

I Thessalonians 4:13

Matthew 19:29

_____ problems can create _____ people!

➤ **Lessons Learned from** _____ - _____

II Corinthians 13:5

Ephesians 5:15

I Timothy 4:16

Acts 14:22

Romans 8:28

Psalm 51

Romans 8:31-32

I Corinthians 11:27-31

My NEXT STEP for this Week:

- Affirm your love to one who is in rebellion.
- Encourage someone in need with a gift.
- Give support to one who is grieving.
- Focus on thanking God for your trial.

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Intro: This is another morning in which we get to practice what we recently studied – “*LIVING THE CROSS CENTERED LIFE.*” That is best practiced in a time of communion. We never should get far from the cross.

As we prepare our hearts for this time ... rather than examining the events of chapter 4 ... I want to trace the experiences of Naomi and Ruth through the first three chapters ... that we might be reminded that their life experience is an illustration of our Christian experience. One of the healthiest things we can do from time to time ... is to examine our Christian walk.

It is not unusual for some well-meaning people to try and convince others to embrace faith in Christ because the Christian life is the best life. But when we honestly define this “best-life” we will agree that it is not a life of ease, free of big problems, and not an easy road to follow. Naomi and Ruth give ample evidence to this from two different perspectives.

➤ **Lessons Learned from Naomi’s CHASTENING**

Ruth 1:1-2

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

1:2 The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

Warren Wiersbe

“If we try to escape our trials, then we will probably miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives.”

Elimelech and Naomi tried to escape their trials ... and exchanged them for death and grief.

God’s will for His chosen people

Psalm 37:3

Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.

#1 – Living in the center of God’s will is the only true place of blessing.

Some Christians leave the will of God thinking that God made His will **OPTIONAL**. I’m reminded how some would like the hymn to say - not “*Take my life and let it be*” to “*Take my wife and let me be.*”

#2 –Living outside the will of God may be delightful for a season ... but that delightful-season will end.

Exhortation

It is our duty to walk by faith not by sight. Fleeing our trials and troubles ... or becoming bitter from them does not demonstrate faith.

Don't despair

Whether we encounter a trial while being in the center of God's will or His chastening for living outside His will – both trials and chastening are **MOMENTARY** and **LIGHT** while being used to bring about great results.

II Corinthians 4:17

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison

Concerning attitude:

When chastening begins our first response might be to **BLAME** God

But trained by chastening and trials we learn – all complaints against God are proven untrue!

Hebrews 12:6

“... those whom the Lord loves He disciplines ...”

#3 - Failure to remain in God's will is not the **UNPARDONABLE SIN**

I Corinthians 11:32

But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

At the time of chastening ...

God appears to be cruel and harsh

Ruth 1:20

“... the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

McGee

When you go out from His presence and lose your fellowship, you're going to find out something. You're going to find out that you get your whipping in the far country and you're going to come home empty, and I mean empty. But, thank God, when you come home that way, just like the prodigal son did, you'll find the Father waiting to receive you with outstretched arms. He'll bless you in a way that He's never blessed you before. He'll be very good to you. That's the thing that happened to the prodigal son. A robe was given to him, a fatted calf was killed for a banquet—all of this for the boy who returned home.

Ruth 1:21

“I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty ... the Almighty has afflicted me?”

She had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons and had come home without them. She had gone to Moab possessing the necessities of life, but now she had returned home having nothing. She was a woman with empty hands, an empty home, and an empty heart. Because

she didn't surrender to the Lord and accept His loving chastening, she did not experience "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). Warren Wiersbe

But God would not leave her in this condition.

The big question

There was a famine when Elimelech and Naomi decided to move out of God's will. Was it her perspective at that time she left that she left full? Undoubtedly not! She left thinking they were empty ... seeking to be made full in Moab.

A life principle ... we do well to anchor our hope on some realistic truths.

Back-sliding will always result in misery. But God has not abandoned His elect. God will not leave us in our misery.

WHAT WE LEARN FROM THIS BOOK:

Life is **TOUGH** but the **BEST** is yet to come.

Psalm 119:67, 71

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

119:71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.

Don't miss this

In the midst of Naomi's misery God expressed His kindness to Naomi via precious Ruth.

- Ruth made Naomi her focus
- It was Ruth who initiated the idea of gleaning in the fields
- It was Ruth who would work passed sundown to gather enough food for Naomi and her
- It was Ruth who did not seek her own enjoyments ... the attention of young men
- She committed herself to caring for Naomi and nothing distracted her from it.

Boaz said to Ruth ... *all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.*

Transition: Naomi's rough road was not the end of the road. Let's consider...

➤ **Lessons Learned from Ruth's SALVATION**

Ruth 1:16-18

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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.

1:17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

1:18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Ruth's departure from her family and culture was not an easy road. But she was determined to be a follower of Naomi's God. Ruth didn't say, *your God will be my God til death do us part* –the all familiar marriage vow. She's not only intensely committed to Naomi – she's intensely committed to following Naomi's God. *Ruth's commitment is total, not just in intensity but also in duration.*

Ruth watching Naomi's response to tragedy of the worst kind – death of her husband and two sons – gave evidence of the true God. Ruth must have seen Naomi grieve differently than her own people. That is because God's people grieve DIFFERENTLY than unbelievers

I Thessalonians 4:13

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

Naomi was bothered how God had dealt with her but she did not reject her God. How Naomi grieved gave **CREDESCENCE** to her God

Compare

From time to time I see video clips of Arab women and Israeli women at funerals ... and observe how they are overwhelmed with grief in the presence of a casket. I don't see that with believers.

By the sovereign grace of God Ruth experiences conversion. God had to do a work in heart because she had several things against her

- ✓ **Her religious background was against her** – for in Moab they worshipped the god, Chemosh – worship that included human sacrifices and promoted immorality (Numbers 25)
- ✓ **Her grief in losing a husband was against her** ... for bitterness to her husband's God could have followed
- ✓ **Left a widow without any support was against her** ... circumstances were against her which could have made her bitter against the God of Israel.
First, her father-in-law died,
and then her husband
and her brother-in-law ...
She could naturally have concluded, "*who would want to follow a God who treats His people this way?*"
- ✓ **Even Ruth who she loved dearly was against her** by trying to talk her into staying in Moab. Naomi urged Ruth to return to her family and her gods.

But Ruth's road to blessing was God's great work within her ... leading to the reward Jesus declared ...

Matthew 19:29 – Jesus said ...

"... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life.

Ruth's tragic experiences led her to faith in the true God. God sometimes uses trauma and crisis to lead unbelievers to salvation. God always uses chastening to bring believers back to fellowship.

BITTER problems can create **SWEET** people!

Transition: Ruth chose the right road ... but it too was a rough road. For leaving one's family, religion, and people would be tough. But oh what a right choice it was!

➤ Lessons Learned from SELF-EXAMINATION

One of the lessons in the Book of Ruth is this – the life of a believer is not always pleasant ... but the end result is always good. God is in the business of allowing bad things ... leading us down rough roads ... to lead us to a precious end. The big question ... *how is God working in your life?*

Application

II Corinthians 13:5

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!

If you have assurance you are “in the faith” – that is that you’re born-again, ask yourself, *is my faith growing?* A good question for each of us to ask ourselves – *where am I in the maturing process?*

Ephesians 5:15

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise

I Timothy 4:16

Pay close attention to yourself ...

Check your responses to tough times ... to be sure you’re not bitter towards God.

This pastor’s perspective

God has called me to remind you of the big picture of the Christian experience. If I merely give you some Scripture to help you with your current problem or crisis ... and fail to give you how your current crisis fits into God’s big picture ... I have given you a Band-aid for that which requires surgery. We need to be reminded of the big picture.

God causing all things to work together for good is one of the most refreshing verses in the Bible. But let’s not forget a very sobering verse of the Bible

Acts 14:22

“... Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

The joy in this verse is: God gets us to our destination despite the rough road. The rough road is not a dead end – it is a road of progress.

What is the big picture?

God ultimately brings about good in our lives

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

This verse should never lead us to think...we can continue in sin...because Living outside the will of God will ultimately result in **GRIEF** and **SHAME**

Some Christians may be miserable because of chastening. But let me be quite candid - this is a *good* misery. For it is designed to lead to forgiveness. It is designed to lead one to a restored relationship with the Lord. Some guilt and shame for past failures is intense because the chastening has been rejected. It remains intense until brokenness follows.

When brokenness and remorse comes...God says...

Psalm 51

“... a broken spirit ... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

And in order for us to be forgiven of our sins ... God would send His Son.

Romans 8:32

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Ultimately ... even though the event was 100's of years away ... It took the death of our dear Lord to get Ruth out of her godless past ... and to forgive the sins of Naomi. Only by the death and blood of our Savior can salvation and restoration take place.

Romans 8:31

What then shall we say to these things? If God {is} for us, who {is} against us?

Transition: We dare not take the work of Christ lightly. Only by His death on the cross could the payment of our sins be made.

I Corinthians 11:27-31

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

11:28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.