

"The Danger of Walking Away from God"

Ruth 1:1-5

Introduction: Last Sunday we started a study in the book of Ruth and in that study we actually took some extra time and we looked closely at the background of the book. This background is very important in understanding the book of Ruth in the proper context. Today in our message we are going to get into chapter 1 and pick up the story but before we do let me quickly refresh your mind with the background.

Notice Ruth 1:1

In the beginning of this verse there are 2 point we need to pay very close attention top as we did last week.

First of all we see that the events of this letter took place in the days when the judges ruled. This was one of the darkest times for the nation of Israel. Last week I showed you that after the death of Joshua the people of Israel became slothful and they did not follow the military manual which God had given to them. In the military manual they were commanded to exterminate the peoples of the land of Canaan. God gave the a warning connected with the manual that said if they were to permit the people of Canaan to exist then Israel would eventually follow after their false gods.

This is exactly what happened. Israel refused to put away the people of the land but instead they made them servants and it was not long until Israel fell into lawlessness and idolatry.

Israel entered into what I call a sin cycle.

1. Sin
2. Oppression
3. Crying out to God
4. Deliverance by a judge.
5. Obedience

This cycle became a pattern and every time they went away from God they continued to sink deeper and deeper.

Judges 21:25

²⁵ *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

So this is the setting for the book.

Notice Ruth 1:1

The next thing we see is there was a famine in the land. This was a result of Israel being outside the will of God.

Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24

¹⁵ *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:*

²³ *And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.*

²⁴ *The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed.*

So keep this in mind: Israel is under the affliction of God and the land is full of lawlessness.

I. Walking away from God

Notice Ruth 1:1-2

Now the Holy Spirit through the pen of the writer now is going to take us inside a family during these dark days of when the judges ruled. Here we are introduced to a husband, his wife and his two children.

His name is Elimelech, his wife is Naomi, and the boys are Mahlon and Chilion.

When the famine strikes Elimelech takes his family and he leaves Bethlehem-judah and he travels to the land of Moab. Now there are several points we need to see here so let us take one point at a time.

1. The famine was the chastening hand of God.

Elimelech's family is in a very difficult situation as they face the famine. But let us not forget that the famine is the result of God's chastening because Israel has turned away

from God. This famine was not sent because God desired to see Israel struggle but it was to bring Israel back to God. This famine was the LOVE of God extended to His people. I can say that because TRUE love does not allow those who are close to continue in sin.

Application:

As we consider this thought I cannot help but wonder about your lives. Maybe things in your life at this time are very difficult. Maybe there is pressure in your life and you are looking for a way to escape the pressure.

Let me just say that before you make a move you need to look on the inside. Maybe the pressure and the struggles are in your life because you are out of the will of God and you are at this time under the chastening hand of God. I want you to know that God has brought this pressure and this affliction because He loves you and He has something far better than what it is that you have allowed into your life to replace Him.

Hebrews 12:6-13

⁶ *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

⁷ *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

⁸ *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

⁹ *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

¹⁰ *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

¹¹ *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

¹² *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;*

¹³ *And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

Now I also need to let you know that all pressure and difficulties in life are the because of chastening. Some of the pressures are simply trials of life that God has allowed us to experience to strengthen our faith.

James 1:2-4

² *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

³ *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

⁴ *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

The famine in Ruth is due to sin that we can be sure of.

Now we must raise the question, "What do you do when you know the pressures you are facing are because of the chastening of God?" Let me show you what Elimelech did.

2. Elimelech turned to Moab for an escape.

This journey down to Moab was a manifestation of the lack of faith in Elimelech's life. Elimelech's name means "MY GOD IS KING". He certainly did not live up to the meaning of his name. He was living the opposite of the promises given in Psalm 37.

Psalm 37:3-4

³ *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*

⁴ *Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*

The name "Bethlehem" meant "HOUSE OF BREAD".

So Elimelech walked away from the promises of God to the GARBAGE CAN OF THE WORLD to seek relief from the famine.

Let me give you a little background on Moab. The Moabites can from the daughter of Lot. They were a people who were cursed from the beginning. Lot's daughters gave him wine and when he became drunk they slept with him and each became pregnant through the incest.

Genesis 19:36-37

³⁶ Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

³⁷ And the first born bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day.

Here is where the Moabites came from. They were a people in Ruth's days that were deep into idolatry. They worshiped the god Chemosh.

1 Kings 11:7a

⁷ Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab,

Now one of the abominations of the worship of this god Chemosh was child sacrifice. This was something that was practiced on a regular basis. Let me show you one such occasion. In 2 Kings Moab is in a battle with Israel and the pressure is on the king of Moab and there is no way out.

2 Kings 3:26-27

²⁶ And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not.

²⁷ Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land.

This was a sacrifice to the god Chemosh.

This helps us to see what kind of a place Elimelech turned to.

3. Elimelech's choice led his entire family away from God.

Notice Ruth 1:2 again.

Elimelech had a wife and 2 sons whom he took with him when he departed to Moab. His son's names were Mahlon and Chilion. When we look at the meaning of their names we see a sad picture.

Mahlon - sickly (It comes from a root word that means "To be grieved").

Chilion - pining ("to suffer with longing").

Application:

Let me pull all of this together now. Here was a man whose name meant "MY GOD IS KING". He is in the midst of a people who have turned away from God and there is no reason to believe that Elimelech was any different. His children were unhealthy and because of sin God brings a famine in the land to turn the people back to HIM. Instead of seeking the will of God, repenting and staying in that land which God had placed him he walks straight away from God.

He decides to take his family and go to Moab, which was considered to be the "garbage can of the world". It was a land and a people which no man should ever have exposed his family to. The famine had caused a void in his life and he was looking to fill the void with that which Moab had to offer.

With that said let us notice the next verse.

Notice Ruth 1:3

We do not know how long he was there but while he was there he died. This brings a couple of verses to my mind.

Proverbs 14:12-14

¹² *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

¹³ *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

¹⁴ *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways:*

Application:

Maybe right now in your life you are where Elimelech was in Israel. You are out of fellowship with God and for that reason there is a famine in your life. It is not a famine of physical food but it is a famine of spiritual food. God has allowed an emptiness to come into your life and He has brought problems in your life and this is all for the purpose of bringing you back to Him.

But instead of stopping where you are and seeking God's will and God's blessings you have turned to the world.

Your children are like Elimelech's in that they are not healthy spiritually speaking because you are not the mom or the dad God wants you to be. Your children are grieved and they long for someone who will fill the void in their lives.

You know your children are not getting what they need from you but you continue to go deeper into the world always trying to find that which will fill the void.

Let me just remind you of a few verses.

James 4:4

⁴Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Conclusion:

Notice Ruth 1:4-5

After Elimelech died his two sons married and they lived in the land of Moab and then they died.

Now I want you to catch what I am about to say. It was God's desire to get Naomi back to the land of Israel. So the death of her husband and the death of her sons happened to drive her back to fellowship with God. Let us remember it is God who sets the boundaries on life. The point is God allowed her to be stripped of that which she loved in order to get her where God wanted her to be.

I point this out to remind you that if you belong to God and you have turned from Him to the world just remember that God will eventually get you back to where He desires for you to be. It is dangerous to suppress the convictions in your life. Turn back NOW!!