

Ruth - Chapter 1

by David Guzik

The book of Ruth shows God's faithfulness and redemption in the midst of crisis and hardship, as seen in the story of Elimelech, Naomi, and Ruth.

Duration: 33:51

Scripture: Ruth 1:1-2, Ruth 1:19, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Gods Love", "Crisis Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the topic of crisis and how people often react poorly under pressure. He emphasizes that even if we fail or want to run away during a crisis, Jesus Christ welcomes us back with open arms. The preacher then relates this message to the story of Ruth in the Bible, specifically focusing on the famine that occurred during the time of the judges. He highlights the importance of understanding that the message of the gospel is not about doing everything right to earn God's love, but rather about God's unconditional love and desire to restore us even when we sin or fail.

Transcript

Good morning everybody. I'm so happy to be here and please pray for Pastor Ricky and the team there in Indonesia. And while they're there and giving themselves out, you know how these outreach trips are, they're gonna be just spending themselves for the Lord and we need to keep them up in prayer.

But in the meantime I'm very happy to be here with you. And today is what? It's Father's Day, right? Shouldn't we pray for the dads here? Being a dad, I say yes. I say dads need prayer.

Yes. So can we just can we just have all the dads stand up and the rest of us will pray for you? Come on. You know who you are.

Lord God in heaven, we believe there's something wonderful in the way that you identify yourself as a father. There's something deep for us to gather from. And every one of us, Lord, as I stand together with all the rest of us who are dads, we ask for your blessing upon us, Lord.

Some of our children are young, some of our children are old, but Lord we still have a role in every one of those lives, even if it's just from a distance in prayer. Lord, bless us as dads. Help us to be godly, good fathers.

Give us wisdom, give us faith, give us hope, and Lord give us joy. You would never identify yourself as a father unless that was something good. And so we pray, God, for you to bless us as fathers.

Pour out your spirit upon us and give us joy in this great calling that you've given us. We thank you, Lord, and we ask that you bless your word to us. In Jesus' name, amen.

You can be seated. As you're finding your seat, find your way to the book of Ruth, chapter 1. It is my real pleasure to spend some time with you, both this Sunday and in a few coming Sundays in the book of Ruth. And we're just gonna go through it verse by verse.

And you know, when you study a book of the Bible, sometimes it's very valuable to spend some time setting the scene with the context and how it fits in with the flow of biblical history. And that's a good thing to do, but right now we're just gonna jump right into the text and take our cue from verse 1. Now, it came to pass when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. Well, maybe it's appropriate here on Father's Day we begin in verse 1 with a man who's a dad.

We don't know his name. His name isn't revealed to us until verse 2. Verse 2 tells us that his name is Elimelech. And Elimelech lived in Bethlehem.

He lived in the time of the judges, which was an interesting time in the history of Israel. It was a period of about 400 years which was marked by a cycle of godliness, blessing, and then overconfidence and pride, and then God's correction, and falling away from the Lord, and then repentance, and cycle after cycle. And during this 400 years of this sort of cyclical nature of Israel's history, God would raise up deliverers that are known as judges to come and do his work amongst the nation.

It wasn't necessarily a godly time. It was a time of real problems in the nation of Israel. Well, during this time, this man, this real person, we're not dealing with Hansel and Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood.

Real man, a real family, a lot more like your family and the people around you than you might think of immediately. This man, this husband named Elimelech, what happened here? We find that in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. I don't know, it's a little hard for us, I think, to connect with that word famine, at least for most of us.

If we lived in a different part of the world or of a different time in history, that word famine might impact us a lot more. You might write next to that word famine, crisis, because if a famine is anything, it's a crisis. No food means you can't just go down to the supermarket and buy some.

It means you'll die, and lots of people did die in famines. This was a ground-shaking crisis for the people of Israel, and this man, in the midst of this crisis, he did something. We'll find out what he did, but what I want you to understand is that this whole issue of crisis, this touches us today, right? Don't people in Santa Barbara face crises from time to time? I suppose there's economic crisis that touches you, right? That there's real upheavals or downturns or recessions or depressions or whatever terminology you want to put upon it.

There's financial things that rock the world that touch your life as well, right? You look at that retirement portfolio that you put some trust in before, and you're very depressed after you look at the value of it right now, right? You maybe are out of a job or facing a slowdown at work or business just isn't as hot as it used to be at your company anymore, so on and so those things are crisis, are they not? Sometimes it's a very

personal family crisis, right? Just reserved for you and your family. That wayward child, that parent who's getting older and is presenting all sorts of problems for the family. This medical problem, that crisis.

Sometimes the crisis is a very personal thing. Other times it's a fire in the hills that makes thousands of people evacuate the homes. You know, we were reading about that on the front page in Germany.

You guys make worldwide news with your crises here in Santa Barbara. What I want you to see is this whole dramatic story of the book of Ruth, which the first chapter, it's really not about Ruth, the first chapter is all about Ruth's mother-in-law named Naomi, but we're not calling it the book of Naomi, but here in this first chapter it all cues off of what happens in a time of crisis. And it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land and a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, not Israel.

He moved his family from Bethlehem, from the inheritance that God had given them, from the community of the people of God, and he said it's not going to work here. I've got to get out of here. I've got to move because there's a crisis that's interrupted everything in my life.

I must flee. And people do that in time of crisis, don't they? Sometimes crisis makes people move geographically. If I just move, I can get away from my problems.

You know that doesn't work, right? Sometimes crisis makes people move, and they don't move geographically, they move spiritually. They just determine in this inner compact in their own soul, I'm not gonna trust God the way that I used to. Maybe he can't be relied upon the way I thought he could.

Sometimes crisis makes people move away emotionally. You just decide to detach. Sometimes you move away morally, right? Crisis makes you think that you can just cut loose the anchors that you had before and do what you want to do morally.

This man moved away, moved away from the promised land, moved away from the community of God's people, and where did he go? Moab, among a pagan people, because he thought he'd be safer in a time of crisis there. Can I tell you it didn't help? Look here starting at verse 2. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah, and they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left in her two sons.

Now they took wives of the women of Moab, and the name of the one was Arpah, and the name of the other was Ruth, and they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. Elimelech says, family, crisis time, we're gonna leave the promised land, we're gonna leave the place where God is directed, we're gonna go to a place and just find a place where we can survive let's move to Moab, and it didn't make anything better.

Soon he died. Before we close the book on Elimelech, do you know what his name means? His name means God is King. He wasn't living like it, was he? He believed that God could maybe be his king, not where he was in Bethlehem.

He had to move away to another place, so he goes away to Moab. There he's in the community among these pagan peoples, and he dies. Naomi says, listen, I've got to have a future for my sons, so instead of moving back to Bethlehem, she says, no, a future for my sons, it's gonna be found among these pagan people in Moab.

I'll marry them off, and I'll marry one to the son, the one son off to a woman named Arpah, not Oprah, Arpah, and the other one to a woman named Ruth, and then the sons die. Do you see how it's going for them? From bad to worse to worse, you try to run away from the problem, run away from the crisis, and it doesn't fix anything. You think a change of scenery will fix it, right? You think you can move away morally or spiritually or emotionally or geographically, and that'll fix something? It doesn't fix anything, because wherever you go, you take yourself with you, and you're right there in the midst of it, and nothing got better.

Matter of fact, it got worse. They took the Moabite wives, these Moabite wives lived on while their husbands died, and so now there were three childless widows, Naomi, Arpah, and Ruth. Now to be a childless widow in the ancient world was to be among the most weak and disadvantaged classes you can imagine.

There was no support system. The only thing you could rely on was the generosity of a stranger, and so Naomi had no family in Moab, no one else to help her. It was a desperate situation, and crisis turned into repeated crisis after crisis.

So what do you do? Well, something glorious happens in verse 6. Take a look. Then she arose with their daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited his people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughter-in-laws with her, that they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

From very distant Moab, Naomi heard something. She heard that the people who stayed behind in Bethlehem didn't all die. Isn't that what they thought? If we stay in Bethlehem, we're all gonna die because of the famine.

She heard, you know what? God is blessing them back in Bethlehem. God is doing something there. The Lord had visited his people, and she said, I want to share in the good things that God is doing among his people there in Bethlehem.

So she went out from the place where she was. She just didn't wish things would be better. She said, I've got to get back right with God.

I'm going back to Bethlehem, and that's exactly what she did. I'm heading back. Orpah and Ruth, come on along if you want.

And she starts going, and out of loyalty, out of a sense of family connection, Orpah and Ruth go with her. Now look, verse 8, notice this. Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, go return each to her mother's house.

The Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that you may find rest each in the house of her husband. So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

You know, I'm fascinated by this connection. Naomi has two sons, no daughters, right? Don't you think Orpah and Ruth were like the daughters she never had? She embraces them. She loves them.

There's this beautiful, wonderful connection that mothers and daughters can have, and then this wonderful, strong relationship, and now Naomi says, I'm going back to Bethlehem, and they all start, well,

they all start crying, just like women would do in such a situation. I don't mean that in a bad way. It's just deeply emotional, right? Aren't they stirred very deeply? No, we can't bear to see you go.

All the crisis has driven us to do all this. They're heading back to Bethlehem, and Naomi says, girls, girls, please consider, you're not Israelites. You're Moabitesses.

You have a future back among the people of Moab. You have no real future with me. Think sensibly, girls.

Stay among your own people, and when she says that, they just cry all the more, and she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. All the emotion shows that there was a real relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law. In verse 10, and they said to her, surely we will return with you to your people.

Now, you know how this works, right? Somebody says, no, you shouldn't do this, and out of courtesy, right? Well, yes, we will do it, and you kind of go back and forth, you know, the polite refusal and all of this, but look at verse 11. Then Naomi said, turn back my daughters. Why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? Turn back my daughters.

Go, for I'm too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you wait for them to be till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters. It grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

Two things here. First, Naomi's having the sensible talk with her daughters-in-law, right? Your future is in Moab. What, are you gonna wait for me to have more sons? It would take them so long to grow up, and then you can't marry a man who's 30 years younger than you.

Forget it, girls. No, you need to stay in Moab, do the sensible thing, and then the line that struck you, it struck me as well, right? At the end of verse 13, the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Man, this weighed heavily on Naomi's heart and mind.

You know, I wonder, and I don't think I'm speculating too much here, don't you think that probably she felt that the crisis came upon their family because they were disobedient? Because they left the promised land? Because they sent off her sons to marry Moabite women? And perhaps Naomi felt a particular guilt over this, because maybe she was the one who pushed them to move out of Israel. We can't say this for certain, right? But it wouldn't be the first time that that happened. Elimelech, we've got to go! There's no food here! It's gonna be desperate! And maybe she was the one who pushed the move out.

Certainly after Elimelech died, she was the one who married off her sons to pagan women. She's feeling guilty! The hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Doesn't that sound just like a person in a crisis? Lord, why are you punishing me? Lord, what did I do to deserve this? And maybe in the back of your mind there's a cloud of guilt that tells you exactly what you did to deserve this, and that's what's haunting you.

Let me address this. First of all, it's a very difficult thing to link any particular crisis in a person's life to a particular judgment of God upon them. Now listen, we do know that God does correct his people, right? God brings correction into our life, and we're grateful for it.

But we have to be very careful, especially from the outside, saying, well, we know why this came upon this person, right? It's because, listen, some of these aspects and the ways and the mind and the methods of

God, it's just unknown to us. What I want you to know, that even though Naomi felt that the hand of the Lord had gone out against her, where does she want to go? She wants to go back to the Lord. And that's exactly what I want you to feel this morning.

If you feel that the hand of the Lord has gone out against you, the circumstances of the life, of your life, seem to speak to you and say, God is not for you, he's against you. Maybe you feel like that this morning. No, I'm sorry you feel that way.

But I want you to see that the answer is not found in running further away from God, the answer is in turning back to him just as Naomi did. There's something else I want you to see here. Don't we see just a shadow, an indication, a shade here of the truth of the gospel? Because the truth of the gospel is this, is that because the hand of the Lord was against God's Son as he hung on the cross, and because he received the judgment that we deserved, God's hand is for you.

I don't know if it feels like that in your life. Maybe it doesn't. And if it doesn't, I understand that.

But you need to understand that the hand of the Lord was against Jesus on the cross so that it could be for us in our life today as we walk with him. And so Naomi, she's dealing with this crisis, she's struggling against the feelings that she's brought it upon herself, but in the midst of it all she says that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me, but I will return to him. Verse 14, Then they lifted up their voices and wept again.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. I find this so interesting. Both Orpah and Ruth felt deeply.

Both of them loved Naomi, both of them were anxious about their future, but a choice had to be made. And Naomi chose to go, excuse me, Orpah chose to go back to Moab, Ruth chose to stay with Naomi. Isn't that interesting? You can have the same feelings as the person right next to you, but feelings don't determine the Christian life.

No, your faith-filled actions determine the Christian life. You see, there comes a place in our following after God where it comes down to doing. Both Ruth and Orpah felt the same feelings, but Ruth did differently.

Some people are very content just to feel Christian feelings. There's a feeling of love for God, there's a feeling of love for his word, there's a feeling of love for his people, but what are you gonna do about those feelings? Listen, aren't you glad that God did more than just feel? For God so loved the world that he felt really bad for us. Goes a lot more than that, right? You know the verse, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

Listen, you might have all kinds of wonderful Christian feelings all bound up in you right now. It's time for those feelings to get out of the feeling part of it and get into being some faith-filled actions. Naomi, standing there with her two daughter-in-laws, Orpah goes back to Moab, Ruth stays with her.

And even though Naomi tries to push her away, look at verse 15, and she said, look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, entreat me not to leave you or to turn back from following after you.

For wherever you go, I will go. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Wherever you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me. And when she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Isn't that a wonderful statement? You have the context for it, right? Headed on their way back to Bethlehem, Naomi says, go home girls, do the sensible thing, go back to Moab. Orpah goes back. Ruth says, no, I am with you forever.

Now listen, there's all sorts of noble commitments here. Wherever you go, I will go. That's a true friend, right? Wherever you lodge, I'll lodge.

Your people shall be my people. That would be remarkably strong, committed friendship, but what I want you to see is that it goes far beyond that, because in verse 16, what does she say? And your God will be my God. Right there, if you wanted to mark any moment, that was the moment of Ruth's conversion.

Because you see what she said? I forsake my Moabite gods, and your God, Naomi, even the God you felt has gone out against you, your God will be my God. Now this is absolutely mind-blowing, because shouldn't Ruth have been afraid of Naomi's God? Naomi, you feel that your God has put his hand against you. I don't want to have anything to do with that God.

The God of the Moabites seemed nicer. No, no, no, she says, I want your God to be my God, and it's the most unlikely of circumstances, because here is Naomi saying how difficult she's had her time with God, and how she feels that the hand of the Lord has been out against her. Nevertheless, she says, I will follow him, and Ruth says, I want to follow him too.

Can I just lay it out here? Ten years of compromise and Moab never made Ruth say, I want your God to be my God, but as soon as Naomi gets right with God, and says, I'm going back to him no matter what, that's when Ruth says, I want to follow your God. You know, sometimes we get under the deluded thinking that our compromise will draw other people to Jesus Christ. That is a terrible deception.

If you want your life to draw other people to Jesus, then you need to be sold out for Jesus Christ as much as you possibly can be. You need to live your life for him, not with any kind of compromise, but to be the very most committed follower of him that you can be, because even though then the crises will still come, you'll have your difficulties in your relationship with God, but people will see the reality behind it, and you'll have people say to you, I want your God to be my God. That's a beautiful thing.

That's just how it should be in our lives, shouldn't it? Shouldn't people be able to look at our lives and say, I want your God to be my God? This is what happened. So what happens here, verse 19, now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem, and it happened when they had come to Bethlehem that all the city was excited because of them, and the women said, is this Naomi? And you have to wonder why they said that. You have to wonder, perhaps she looked a lot older, right? Not just 10 years older, because sometimes 10 years can age a person 20 or 30 years, can't it? She comes back and they say, oh my heavens, this is Naomi.

She left 10 years before with her husband Elimelech and their two young sons, and they left here 10 years ago because they were frightened because of the famine. They left, and now they come back, Elimelech's dead, those two beautiful boys are dead, and all she comes back with is a pagan girl named Ruth who says that now she wants to follow the God of Israel. And so what is the response here? It's very powerful.

Verse 20, but she said to them, do not call me Naomi, call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi since the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me? Do you get this? The name Naomi means pleasant.

The name Mara means bitter. Don't call me pleasant. Because the last 10 years have been anything but pleasant, the last 10 years have been bitter, and that's why I'm back.

I want you to notice this. First of all, Naomi wasn't a phony. She didn't go home, pretend that everything was fine, and say everything was pleasant, everything was Naomi, right? She went back and she went back honestly and she said, here I am and my life has been bitter.

And then she goes on and she makes these very strong statements in verse 20, did you see it? The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. The Lord has brought me a home again empty. The Lord has testified against me.

Naomi was not afraid to see the hand of God even in her crises. She knew that all the tragedies that came upon her did not come just out of bad luck or chance or bad fortune. No, she felt that the tragedies were an example of God's affliction because she couldn't see the end of God's plan.

But she knew that there was a sovereign God in heaven and that he was managing things. But what I want you to see in the midst of all these bitter circumstances, Naomi was not bitter against the Lord. You know how I know that? I know that because there she is back with the Lord in Bethlehem.

If she was bitter against the Lord, she would have stayed in Moab or gone even further away from the Promised Land. But she says, God, I don't understand it. God, I feel bitter, but I'm coming back to you.

Can you imagine somebody coming up and asking Naomi this question? Naomi, if God has dealt very bitterly with you, if the Lord has brought you home empty, if the Lord has testified against you, then why have you come back? And she would have said, because I want to get right with him again. Things have been terrible. And the answer isn't in going further from God, but in drawing closer to him.

Look at the first few words of verse 22. So Naomi returned. She came back.

And look, I think about it. Think about it in the broader context of crisis, right? How you handle crisis that has come upon your life. All kinds of different ways you can list crisis.

And maybe some of you, you've done very poorly under crisis, right? Honestly, maybe that's you. The test was given and you failed. You wanted to run as fast as you could away.

And listen, even if you couldn't run away in any of the ways you wanted to, your heart wanted to do it really, really bad. And you look back on yourself and you say, man, I'm a lot like a limelight. The crisis came and I wanted to flee.

Can I give you the good news? Jesus Christ welcomes you back with open arms. If you think that the message of the gospel is, you do everything right and God will bless you. Now come on now, you get your life right and God will love you.

You turn over a new leaf and then things can start being good again. If you think that's the message of the gospel, you're sadly mistaken. The message of the gospel is, even when you sin, God loves you and

wants to restore you.

Even when you fail under the test, God wants to bring you back where you should be. You come back to him just like Naomi did. I see here, in this first chapter of Ruth, a powerful example of a woman who failed under the test.

She suffered grievously for it and yet she turned back to God and you don't even know what God's gonna do in her life. Right now, look at verse 22. So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, returned from the country of Moab and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Look, I don't mind if you read ahead in the book of Ruth, you should, because this is such a wonderful story. You can hardly believe the blessing that God has in store for both Naomi and Ruth in the coming chapters. More than they could ever imagine, they come back to Bethlehem hoping that they're gonna survive and God says, survive? I've got much, much more for you than that.

You just wait till you see what I'm gonna do in your life. Naomi felt that God's hand had turned against her, but God's hand was very much for her, she just couldn't see it yet. And that is what we need to cling to.

The greatness of our God shown more in anything than what Jesus did for on the cross shows us, shows us very powerfully, that God is for us. Now what we do is turn back to him. Look, in the coming chapters you're gonna see that not only what God does for this is good for Ruth, not only is it good for Naomi, but I'll tell you who it's good for, it's good for you and me.

Because without what God did through Naomi and Ruth, it all connects in a great big chain that ends up with our salvation in Jesus Christ. That's for the coming weeks, but right now, shouldn't we think seriously about how we respond to these crises? And even if you have failed miserably, turn your heart to Jesus. Remember the greatness of the gospel and how he receives you now with open arms.

For some of us, it's time to come back to Bethlehem, just as Naomi did. Now look, what I'm gonna do now is I'm gonna pray, the worship team's gonna come forward, we're gonna have a prayer team down front here. I think it's time for us just to do that.

For some of us, especially, you need to come up front here and pray with somebody. You need to do something about what God has spoken to your heart during this message, because don't you miss it? It's time to respond to God the right way in the midst of this kind of crisis. Let's stand together and pray.

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