

Summer Series: July 26th Session One: Dealing with Disaster

Welcome:

Welcome to our zoom service this morning.

- Today is the first session of our summer programme.
- We normally try to make these services more interactive
- This is going to be hard via zoom but hopefully we can learn something together.

We are going to be looking at the book of Ruth

- And the topic for this morning is dealing with disaster
- Let's begin with a prayer

Prayer:

Father God, we come into your presence this morning knowing you are a good loving and faithful God. Help us to know you with us. To hear you speak words of comfort and encouragement. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may serve you and minister your love to our families and friends

In Jesus name

Amen

Worship Song:

Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

A time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

Open Prayer:

- Birthdays: Jenny H
- Week 4: Sunday School and Youth Group

Talk:

Preamble

Over the summer we are going to be looking at the story of Ruth

- Ruth is one of two books in the Bible named after someone who was a foreigner
- Neither Jewish nor Christian
- Do you know the other one? (Job)

Like Job, Ruth's story begins with disaster

- The story starts in Bethlehem
- With a Jewish family living there.

Story: (Ruth 1 :1-5). Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

³ Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Introduction.

This is not a happy passage

- Consequently, it is one we usually skip over.
- We know Ruth is a love story with a happy ending
- So, we concentrate on that bit and forget about the beginning

But it begins with loss, grief, and bereavement.

- These are difficult things to talk about
- Yet for Ruth and Naomi it is part of their life
- Part of who they were
- I doubt the happy ending meant they just forgot about their former husbands.

Grief and loss are part of life

- Something we will all experience at some time
- They are part of our story and help make us who we are.
- It is not good or helpful to ignore it.
- We need to know it is okay not to be okay
- As the Wise Man who wrote Ecclesiastes said

I think part of the trouble is that we have become comfortable

- We begin to think everything should be good
- And when things aren't, we think that its not right
- And somebody should be to blame.

But difficult times are part of normal life.

- God does not promise we will avoid them
- But he does promise he will walk through them with us.
- In his famous 23rd Psalm David calls the Lord his shepherd
- Celebrates His love and care in looking after him
*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he
 refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*
- Yet he also recognises that he will inevitably go through hard times
- Times of grief, fear and pain, yet in those times God will still be with us.
*⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with
 me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

The apostle Paul tells us about what he calls his 'thorn in the flesh'

- He recognised he had been amazingly blessed by God but admitted
*"Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my
 flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to
 take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my
 power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)*

He doesn't say what this 'thorn' was

- But it was something that troubled him
- Caused him grief and pain
- God did not take it away despite his prayers
- But instead he encouraged Paul to trust Him anyway.

There are many other examples in the bible

- Hannah was so distressed about her childlessness the high Priest Eli thought she was drunk (1 Sam. 1:13-14)
- Ezra fasted as he mourned over the people's unfaithfulness (Ezra 10:6)
- When threatened with disaster in the time of Esther we are told
*"There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.
 Many lay in sackcloth and ashes." (Esther 4:3)*

Grief is a natural response to loss.

- Many things can cause us grief,
 - Death of a loved one,
 - Break up of relationships,
 - Problems with our families or health.
 - A major change in life
 - Loss of a desired or expected future.

All these and more can leave us feeling all kinds of grieving emotions

- And everybody's experience and response to grief will be different
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve
- So, we must be careful not to be judgemental towards others or ourselves.

Having said that some attitudes or responses to grief can be unhelpful

- Feelings of anger, guilt and fear are normal
- But wrong beliefs about God and ourselves can make these worse.
- When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she said to her friends and neighbours *"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. (Ruth 1:20)*
- (Naomi means pleasant and Mara means bitter)

Naomi blamed God for what had happened and concluded He was against her

- We know that wasn't true
- And as the story unfolds, we will see how God brought blessing to her.
- But often we can be like Naomi
- And succumb to myths about God's intentions

Myth Busters:

As in the TV programme of the same name we are going to look at common myths and see if they are true.

Myth 1: Disaster means God is punishing me

When things go wrong it is because I have sinned. If I was obedient to God, my life would be blessed

- In the Old Testament God does promise blessing to his people if they follow his rules and curses if they do not.
- For example, Deuteronomy 28; 1-2
If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

Let's look at the facts

This is written to the nation as a whole

- Many of God's so called 'judgements' are natural consequences of our behaviour
- Obviously, a country run with just and fair rules will be better than one that has corrupt and exploitative leaders
- But does this work for individuals?
- Jesus had something to say about this

Luke 13: 1-5

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Many things that go wrong are the result of sin,

- But it is not necessarily the guilty who suffer most.
- Jesus is saying personal disaster is not the fault of the victim because we all do things wrong
- Bad things sometimes just happen
- Jesus said, *'Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted'* (Matt. 5:4)

Myth Busted

Myth 2: God is teaching me a lesson, if I learnt the lesson God would stop

Hebrews 12:7 says

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?"

Let's look at the facts.

We are called to be disciples

- That means we are learning to be better followers of Jesus
- That means God is like a teacher
- Any teacher knows students learn most in a constructive and disciplined environment where they are encouraged and supported
- Constant criticism is never helpful
- But using things that go wrong as a lesson can be useful
- (Note: in the bible tempted and tested are often the same word)

James tells us this in James 1:2-4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

And also, in verse 13

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone

So, God does not make us suffer in order to teach us a lesson. but he does help us use these experiences to grow and learn.

Myth Busted

Myth 3: I'm not in Gods will

God has a perfect plan for my life. He wants to bless me. If I turn away from that plan, then I will not receive this blessing.

If I was doing what God wanted, I wouldn't be facing this trouble

Let's look at the facts

- God does want to bless us but that doesn't mean he will give us everything we want or make life easy for us.
- Jesus was always in God's will and he faced trials and temptations.

Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Job faced every kind of disaster you could imagine

- His friends told him he must have strayed from Gods will
- But in the end God intervened and told his friends to back off
- In fact, he told them to apologise.

Job 42:7

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.

Myth Busted

Myth 4: My Grief Shows a Lack of Faith

If I had more faith in God I wouldn't worry or grieve because I would trust God to look after me.

Let's look at the facts

The Bible acknowledges that we all face grief and disaster at times, and it is not wrong to feel bad.

- There are psalms that express grief and sorrow
- One was made famous by Bony M
- And talks of the grief when people were exiled from their homes
"By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion." (Psalm 137:1)
- Lamentations is a whole book pouring out pain and loss to God

In fact, Jesus also felt grief and loss

- He wept over Jerusalem because they had rejected God. (Matthew 23:37)
- He wept at the grave of Lazarus. (John 11:35)
- On the cross he cried out *"My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Mark 15:34)

We are told even the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30 & Isaiah 63:10)

- If God can feel grief and sorrow it cannot be wrong

Myth Busted

Talk Conclusion

I want to finish with a few practical thoughts about dealing with disaster

- What to do when your life has fallen apart
 - And you are hurt and grieving
1. Acknowledge your pain.
 - Express it, just like the psalmists and Jeremiah in lamentations
 - Accept that grief can be a roller coaster.
 - Don't feel guilty if it produces all sorts of emotions.
 - Job complained bitterly to God, yet God was not cross with him
 2. Your grief is personal to you
 - You have to conform to anyone else's idea of how you should grieve
 - Many of us will be familiar with what is called the five stages of grief
 - This was developed from observations by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross
 - It is not supposed to be prescriptive nor in any particular order
 - But she observed these in her patients
 - Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance
 - We may recognise some of these but equally grieving is very individual experience
 - There is no normal
 3. Seek out support from people who care about you.
 - You are not alone
 - Understand they may find it hard to know what to say but are often only too happy to help
 4. Take care of yourself
 - Try to eat and sleep and exercise.
 - Keep a routine
 - Do things you enjoy
 - Having a happy moment does not mean you no longer care.
 5. Draw comfort from God
 - There are many verses to help you find God in the midst of grief.
 - Particularly in the Psalms
 - Keep praying, God will not be upset if you are honest and pour out your heart to him.

Conclusion - Hope

In the story of Pandora's box

- All of earth's evils escape into the world
- Last of all crawls out a weak and feeble creature that is hope.
- A strange story but illustrates the point that we can withstand much if we have hope.
- So, I want to end with a thought on hope.

We may never really understand why things go wrong

- But we have hope in God to hang on to.
- Jeremiah describes this well in Lamentations

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.

²⁰ I will remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Maybe true blessing is not in the absence of grief pain

- but in having Jesus to hold on to in the midst of it.
- As Jesus himself said
- "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4)

Amen

Worship Song:

Closing prayer:

Lord Jesus, you have said you came to be good news, to bind up the broken hearted, to comfort those who mourn, to give them a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Help us to know your love in both the good and bad times.

Help us to find your light in the darkness and discover you in our pain as well as our joy, in our doubts as well as our believing.

Lord, this morning we want to put our hand in yours and walk with you into a world that desperately needs the hope you bring.

Shine through us, speak through us and live in us so all may know they are loved by you

Amen

Grace:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever more. Amen