

Summer Series: 2nd August 2020: Ruth Session 2: Commitment to God

1. Welcome-- Jenny H

- Welcome to all
- Second in our Summer series on the book of Ruth
- Topic is Commitment to God

2. Reading- Philippians 3:-7-8-- Jenny H

2. Opening Prayer-

3. Worship Song-- Neil and Jenny B

4. Quick Quiz-- Neil and Cathy

1. Why did Elimelech go to live in Moab with his family?

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|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. Disagreement with his town leaders | C. Distant relatives invited him |
| B. Famine in his home town- [Correct] | E. Earthquake in his home town |

2. What were the names of Elimelech's two sons?

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| A. Jacob & Esau | C. Mahlon & Chilion-[Correct] |
| B. Pharez & Zarah | D. James & John |

3. What happened to Elimelech in Moab?

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|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A. He died-[Correct] | C. He was killed by the King of Moab |
| B. He left his wife | D. His sons murdered him |

4. What happened to Naomi's sons in Moab?

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| A. They left their wives | C. They were driven out of the land by the local Moabites after an argument over land |
| B. They went after some lost sheep and both fell down a ravine and broke their legs. | D. They died-[Correct] |

5. What relationship was Ruth to Naomi?

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|------------------|------------------------------|
| A. Daughter | C. Daughter-in-law-[Correct] |
| B. Granddaughter | D. Niece |

5. Reading- Ruth 1: 6-18-- Cathy

When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

6. Background on Moab and the people in the story-- Jenny H

I wanted to find out more about the people in this reading. Elimelech was a staunch member of the Hebrew race. He was part of an outstanding family, brother of Salmon prince of Judah who married Rahab. They were comfortably off. The name Elimelech means ‘my God is King’. He would know the Hebrew promise which said “in the days of famine thou shalt be satisfied”. So why did he decide to take his family and leave Bethlehem which means land of bread and go to somewhere forbidden? Why was going to Moab a forbidden thing?

Well, let’s find out about Moab. If we look back at the life of Abraham, we learn that God told Abraham to leave Ur and as Genesis 12 says God promises to make Abraham into a great nation.

Abraham takes with him his nephew Lot probably assuming that any descendants will come from him as Abram and his wife are not young. But God didn't tell him to take Lot along and Abraham hasn't yet got into the habit of talking to God before putting his plan into action. You could say he was outside of God's will at this time. When their herds get too large Abram offers Lot the choice of land and Lot chooses the better pasture.

Unfortunately, his land contains the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and we all know that story! In fleeing from God's vengeance on the cities, Lot's wife disobeys and becomes a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters hide in a cave where the daughters decide their chances of finding husbands looks bleak, so they get their father very drunk and take turns to sleep with him. The first child (grandchild) of this Union is called Moab. In a Bible footnote mine has one of those assertions that the name 'sounds like' in this case like the Hebrew term 'from father'. Another commentary says it means waste or nothingness. Gen 19 v 37. Again, I am sure this wasn't part of God's plan.

In reality Moab was actually quite a beautiful land. It had a range of mountains bordering the Dead Sea. In Deuteronomy 34 we read that Moses climbed Mount Nebo so he could look over at the promised land. Shortly after that he died and was buried in a valley in Moab. That range of mountains means there was a plentiful supply of rain and numerous streams so grain and fruit grew and sheep had pasture. The Moabite people worshipped Chemosh, Ashtorchemosh and fertility gods and goddesses.

So back to Elimelech. In reality, Moab was only about 30 miles from Bethlehem. We don't know how many people made the journey although we do know that when Naomi returns there are people who recognise her, so it seems some townsfolk survived the famine. We can never really know why this pair made the decision to take their sons and go, though hunger must have been a big issue.

Like Abraham with Lot they probably didn't consult God first though that would have changed the genealogy tables later in the Bible. Again, they were not in God's will. We do know that marrying Moabite women was forbidden (Nehemiah 13). We don't know why all 3 men died. Some say there was a plague of some sort, others that it was retribution for their disobedience. Naomi felt that the God of her fathers had deserted her for her desertion of Him. This all causes me to wonder how often I stray from God's will. Do I even remember to ask His divine opinion or do I go ahead convinced of the surety of my actions? There are lessons to be learned through this ancient story which are just as true today.

However, when we come to the parting of the 3 women, I remembered how much this bit of the story resonates with me.

7. Talk about mothers-in-law –Jenny H

As I have shared before, my parents had 2 unplanned children in their 40s when money was short, and they were ill equipped for 2 more mouths to feed.

Whilst they weren't facing famine, they were certainly in a bit of bother and God wasn't part of the equation. To make matters worse, soon after I (the fourth child) was born, my brother who was 4 years older became seriously ill and spent a lot of time in hospital. I don't know who looked after me though I suspect it was my elder brother's wife. I know she took me to school as my mother thought people would stare at her as an older mother!

We never seemed to gel as a family and I can never recall us all going out anywhere together or on a holiday. We didn't even eat round a table as a family. Imagine then when I first met my future in-laws who were about as different to my family as it was possible to be. My mother in law showed me the love my mother hadn't, and I eventually flourished in her presence. In the circumstances that Ruth found herself in, it would have been a no-brainer for me. I am struck by how much God seems to have been left out in most of the big decisions in this story but He certainly wasn't left out of Ruth's insistence that she was going with Naomi. She may not have worshipped Almighty God but she was inside His will.

8. Talk - Cathy

As we have heard from Jenny, Elimelech and Naomi should have never left their homeland but the Lord does not allow her to stay away for ever. So, through various circumstances, God deals with Naomi in order to get her to return home. She simply is left with no other option here, it is either to go home or stay and be destitute.

The Lord is clearly dealing with Naomi. In order to get her back to where she should be he has to take away her husband and sons, the very people that she would have depended upon to provide for her. The Lord left her in such a situation that it seems from a human perspective that she was left with no other option. But from the passage it seems that Naomi's heart was still in Bethlehem, otherwise she would not have heard the news that the Lord has come to the aid of his people.

She was looking for a way to return and now the Lord has opened the door wide for her. This is often how the Lord has to deal with us. It might be that spiritually we leave the place we ought to be with the Lord, it might be that as a result of this drifting from the Lord that we move away from his people and from his church. There are many ways that the Lord deals with us but whatever God decides, we can rest assured that his dealings are always wise and loving. Even though the Lord's hand had been heavy upon Naomi by the end of this book we will be able to see how God's discipline upon her was for her ultimate good.

The good news is that God is intimately involved in our lives; He does not leave us to our own devices even when we wander from Him or take a course of action that is not in His plan. He is involved in all our situations and he is working his purposes out through the good and bad decisions that we make.

Naomi's decision to return affected Orpah and Ruth -were they going to go back with Naomi or stay in their homeland?

At first their decision seems clear for we read that they set out with Naomi on the road that led to Judah (v.7). Now Naomi must have been a good and kind mother-in law for these two ladies to be prepared to leave their homeland and their families and go to a completely strange land with a strange religion just for the Naomi's sake.

Naomi knew how hard it was going to be for Orpah and Ruth so she urges them to go back to their own families. She acknowledges that they have been kind to their husbands and to Naomi (v.8). She even prays that the Lord will be kind to them and grant them another husband who can look after them (v.9). But both Orpah and Ruth were determined to go with Naomi (v.10). Once again Naomi tries to persuade them to go home to their families and she gives them very good reasons for doing so (vs.11-13).

What is Naomi doing? Did she not want them to come with her, did she not want them to become worshippers of the true God, did she not want to save them from the idolatry of Moab? I think the answer to those questions is that Naomi wanted them to come with her but only if they realised what was involved. She is seeking to spell out the implications for them; if they are going to go to Judah she wants them to come, not through some emotional attachment to her but because they believe this is right. To go to Judah would involve a whole new lifestyle and a whole new religion. No one worshipping the gods of Moab was welcome in Judah so Naomi is saying, unless you are prepared to leave your own way of life and your old gods and in faith cling to a new way of life with a new God then you would be better going home to your families in Moab, and finding a husband who will continue in the worship of the gods of Moab.

To put it in today's terms what Naomi is saying is that coming with me means that you are claiming conversion. No longer is Moab your home and no longer is "Chemosh" your god but Judah will be your home and Jehovah will be your God. After this explanation Orpah was persuaded to go back to Moab to her family and to her gods (vs.14-15)

However, what a contrast we have with Ruth - she could not be persuaded to go back to Moab (v.14). She will attach herself to Naomi to Naomi's people and to Naomi's God. In doing so she is leaving behind her old way of life and her old gods and is now committed to her new way of life to her new people and to her new God. This was not based upon a better future-there simply was no guarantee that life would get any better for her.

She had food in Moab and her future prospects of finding another husband and having children who could look after her in her old age were ten times better in Moab than in Judah. But she has been persuaded and convinced, probably by the faith of Naomi, that Judah's God is the true God; the one worth following whatever the future held for her.

Ruth's statement of faith is one of the most important statements in the book of Ruth. She is in faith committing herself to the true God and in doing so is of course committing herself to Naomi (vs.16-17). She is prepared to give up everything to leave her past life, and her past gods in order to cling to Naomi and to Naomi's God.

We see this in today's world as well, there are people who are affected by the gospel message. They become quite fond of Christian people but at the end of the day when a decision has to be made between their way of life and Christ and between their life without Christ and life with Christ then they simply are not prepared to pay the cost. However, if we are going to become committed to Christ then we all need to display the faith that Ruth displayed. A faith that was willing to give up her past to leave her family and friends and culture and gods in order to cling to Christ and in order to be committed to Christ's people. Jesus highlighted the cost in following Christ in Matthew 10:37-39 where the choice is clear; either Christ or others will be our first love but not both.

This is a challenge that continues to come to us even as Christian people. There is a cost to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus- a cost that involves putting Christ before our families and friends.

Although Ruth was paying a cost to go with Naomi, she was also making some great gains. She was gaining a new people for Ruth says 'your people will be my people' (v.16). She will no longer classify herself as belonging to the people of Moab but as belonging to the people of God. Likewise when we become followers of Jesus Christ there is a cost to be paid, sacrifices to be made but there are also great gains. We become members of God's family; we inherit new brothers and sisters in Christ.

Not only do we gain a new family but a new God. Ruth says 'your God will be my God.' (v.16) The things or 'gods' that we once worshipped are gone for good. Now we have a God who loves us and demonstrated how much he loved us by sending his Son to die for us. We have a God who treats us not as our sins deserved but with mercy and grace. We belong to a God who hears us and speaks to us through the word of the living God.

Ruth says that 'where you die I will die.' (v.17) In other words she is saying there is no going back wherever this commitment leads me I will go the whole way. When we come to Christ in faith then we are gaining a whole new future. We may not always know what that future holds, you have no idea where God will take you or where you will eventually die.

9. Teaching Themes:

Questions to ask everybody

- What does it mean to risk all for God?
- When is it hard to trust Him?
- What if you follow God but don't get what you want?

10. Open Prayer-- Jenny and Cathy

- No Birthdays but ask for things to pray for.
- Week 1 – Pray for the Friendship group

11. Worship Song-- Neil and Jenny B

12. Closing Prayer – Cathy

13. Grace-- Jenny H (a Celtic blessing)

May the road rise up to meet you

May the wind be always at your back

May the sun shine warm upon your face

And the rain fall soft on your fields

And until we meet again

May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

14. Word Puzzle up during the tea/coffee – see if you can find the sentence-