

Ruth 2016 1D

- This morning I want to bring you back again into our second story, the story within the story of Ruth
 - Within the book of Ruth we read not only of a family in Israel, but also a story of a nation, Israel, and her Husband Jehovah
 - This poignant love story of two widows seeking the security of a provider also pictures God's love for His chosen people
 - Each week we've studied one or the other of these stories
 - Last time we looked at the return of Naomi and Ruth to the land of Judah

Ruth 1:7 So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

Ruth 1:8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

Ruth 1:9 "May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Ruth 1:10 And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."

Ruth 1:11 But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

Ruth 1:12 "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

Ruth 1:13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

Ruth 1:14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Ruth 1:15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

Ruth 1:16 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.

Ruth 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."

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

Ruth 1:19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

[Ruth 1:20](#) She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[Ruth 1:21](#) “I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

- Today we examine the prophetic story told by those same events
 - Naomi lived in days of sinfulness, and she endured God’s judgment against the land in the form of a drought and famine
 - So her family fled from her land and into the land of her enemies, the Moabites
 - These details picture the wife of Jehovah, Israel, judged by God for disobedience by scattering Israel into the land of her enemies
 - This scattering had the effect of reducing Israel’s numbers, bringing them misery and weakness
- As they remained outside their land for two millennia, the people of Israel pined away
 - Until they were only a remnant reduced greatly in number from their prior days when they lived in peace and comfort in their land
 - So just as Elimelech’s family is a fraction of it’s original size, so will Israel be as they begin to return from the nations
- Then we saw Naomi’s story beginning to change after about 10 years
 - And as we studied, that estimation held more meaning than simply an approximate period of time
 - Since 9 is the number of judgment and 10 the number of testimony, this statement is not just speaking of time
 - It’s communicating God’s purpose
 - About 10 years meant the time of judgment for Naomi’s family was coming to an end
 - And a time for testifying of the Lord’s faithfulness was about to begin
 - Like Elimelech’s family, Israel was scattered for a period of judgment

- And like Naomi, God promised Israel He would regather the survivors on a future day
- For the past 60 years of history we've been privileged to watch that regathering taking place in Israel
- In a sense, we're living in chapter 1 of Ruth right now
- We're watching the family of Israel, the forsaken wife of Jehovah, coming back to her land looking for rest
- In the first story, Naomi is returning to her land as a different woman than the one that left ten years earlier
 - Now she is a widow without sons
 - In the days of this story and in the eastern culture, the plight of a woman without a husband or son was one of desperation
 - Woman couldn't own property, generally couldn't earn a living, couldn't testify in court
 - More importantly, the family name was only carried forward by male heirs
 - So a woman without a husband or a son was like an orphan
 - All land ownership rights in Israel transferred through inheritance according to the tribal family name
 - So a widow without sons would lose her claim to the land, lose her support, making her a good candidate for starvation
- So the family of this woman Naomi was literally at the end of the line
 - The end financially, the end socially, the end emotionally
 - Her husband is gone and both her sons are gone
 - So she has no hope for bringing herself out of her hopelessness
 - You can appreciate the plight of widows from a scene in Luke 7

[Luke 7:11](#) Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.

[Luke 7:12](#) Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

[Luke 7:13](#) When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."

[Luke 7:14](#) And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"

[Luke 7:15](#) The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

- Jesus' compassion for this widow was as much a matter of her bleak financial future as it was for her mourning for her son
- His miracle gave her back both her son and her security
- Which helps us understand Naomi's decision to return to her land
 - She is driven to return primarily by a desire for security
 - For a posterity
 - For someone to rescue her and give her rest in every sense of the word
- So then knowing Naomi's situation, what do we learn of our other widow Israel?
 - Amazingly, throughout the thousands of years the people of Israel were scattered around the globe, they never ceased to maintain their identity
 - There is no parallel in all anthropology
 - Israel remained distinct as a nation though they had no country of their own and were living in other's lands
 - This sort of thing never happens
 - A group of refugees might remain distinct while living in another land for a few generations
 - Maybe even their language and a few traditions remain after a few hundred years
 - We can see this trend in cultural concentrations like "chinatown" or "little italy" in certain big city places
 - But such groups are only able to maintain their identities because their homelands still exist to supply them with new immigrants on a regular basis (i.e., China and Italy still exist)

- Without this regular supply, the conclaves would soon disperse into the local culture
- Their separate identity would be lost in time
- Immigrants into larger societies always meld and assimilate into the larger culture
- But Israel never did this, despite having no homeland for nearly 2,000 years
 - Jews have remained distinct from other cultures wherever they lived in the world
 - Even when they were persecuted and systematically murdered, they maintained their identity and survived
- Clearly God has been at work preserving a remnant of Israel
 - He was keeping His promise to Israel to preserve them as a distinct people among their enemies
 - Ironically, their distinction was the source of their misery
 - They have remained the most persecuted people throughout the ages since their dispersion in AD 70
 - Their strong identity has caused the nations wherever they lived to strike out against them
 - It would have been so much easier for Israel to simply blend in and become part of the culture in which they lived
 - But God never allowed that to happen
 - This is the life of Israel in her widowhood
 - Living in the land of her enemies, yet those foreign lands hold no true security or rest
 - Because it's ultimately not home
 - No matter how comfortable the Jewish people might become living among other nations, the comfort was temporary
 - They lacked a place of rest and security
 - They were like a widow in their lack of an inheritance

- But then in 1948, everything changed
 - Jews the world over awoke on May 14th, 1948, to the reality of a Jewish state for the first time since AD 70
 - Immediately, millions of Jews began making plans to return
 - Finally, they could find rest from their enemies they thought
 - Finally, they could be at peace in their home
 - But they didn't return the same people who left
 - They were reduced in number
 - Though they were happy to live in their homeland again, they were bitter
 - Generations of persecution and loss and suffering had taken a toll
 - And they were grieved
 - Remember what we read last time as Naomi decided to return to Israel

Ruth 1:19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

Ruth 1:20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

Ruth 1:21 "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

- Like the widow Israel, Naomi returned when she learned there was opportunity again in Israel
- But she returned grieved, reduced in number, bitter
- More importantly, Naomi didn't return alone
 - In tow were two Gentile women, Orpah and Ruth
 - As we saw last time, Orpah was an unbeliever who wouldn't make the trip
 - The other, Ruth, attaches herself to Naomi
 - Consider what Ruth's future held in Israel

- Like Naomi, she was a widow
- But unlike Naomi, Ruth was young enough to expect an opportunity to remarry
- But Ruth is leaving her native land where she would be free to remarry anyone
- And she is going to a foreign nation where the men were forbidden by law from marrying her
- So Ruth's decision to accompany Naomi is a crazy decision
- As we learned last time, Naomi's God has revealed Himself to Ruth and stirred up such a love for Him that it leads Ruth to attach herself to Naomi
 - In fact, Ruth is so attracted to Naomi and her God that she is willing to leave everything behind, even the prospect of a husband
 - This is quite a commitment
 - This attachment of Ruth, a Gentile, to Naomi, a Jewish widow, is another picture of the widowed wife of Jehovah
 - God knew that his wife, Israel, would depart from Him and chase after other gods
 - And so He forewarned Israel they would know a time of severe judgment for their unfaithfulness
 - But God also said He would turn this time of judgment into something good for other nations
 - He would use Israel's judgment to extend His grace to another group of people

Deut. 32:20 "Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be;
For they are a perverse generation,
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.

Deut. 32:21 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God;
They have provoked Me to anger with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

- The Lord declared that as Israel provoked Him, He would establish a new relationship with a different people

- This new relationship would “provoke” the Jewish nation into a form of jealousy for what they lacked
- Who is this foolish nation?
- The Hebrew word for nation in Deuteronomy is *goy*
- It means Gentiles, any non-Jew
- God said through Moses that He would establish a covenant relationship with Gentiles following a period of Jewish rebellion
 - He would use this relationship to provoke jealousy or a longing within Israel to know Him again
 - Israel would be jealous for their relationship with God
 - Jealous for their rest in that relationship
- God set out to create this opportunity among a group that never would have sought it otherwise

Is. 65:1 “I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me;
I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me.
I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’
To a nation which did not call on My name.

- Ruth represents the Gentiles who will seek after God during a period of Israel’s judgment
 - As Isaiah foretold

Is. 55:5 “Behold, you will call a nation you do not know,
And a nation which knows you not will run to you,
Because of the Lord your God, even the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you.”

Is. 55:6 Seek the Lord while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near.

- He will call a nation that the Jews do not know
- And this nation that doesn’t know Israel will run to Israel
- Because of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel

- This is exactly a description of Ruth, isn't it?
 - She didn't know the God of Israel
 - But because of a period of judgment upon the Jewish people, Ruth came to know Yahweh
 - And now as a result, Ruth is running toward Naomi and away from her own people
 - Ironically, Ruth has found the rest that Naomi still seeks
- In the same way as Ruth attached herself to Naomi, the Gentiles of the world will become attached to Israel
 - They will hear and believe the gospel of a Jewish Messiah sent to save them
 - They will enter into a covenant with that Messiah, a covenant given to Israel
 - This attachment is spiritual as Paul summarizes in Romans 11

Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

Rom. 11:12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

- Paul explains that God has set the Jewish nation aside for a time
 - But Israel's sin has made a way available for the Gentile nations to know God
 - Paul wanted the Church to understand that Israel's judgment was the means for their blessing
 - Therefore, a future day of Israel's restoration would be a time of glory for the world
- Paul says in v.12 that if God could produce so much good from Israel's judgment, how much more will God produce in restoring them?
 - Then Paul explains how the Church is attached to Israel, as a Gentile family member

Rom. 11:17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree,

Rom. 11:18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.

- Paul uses the analogy of an olive tree to represent Israel and Gentile nations
 - The tree of Israel was pruned for disobedience, with branches broken off
 - Then God proceeded to graft in unnatural branches, the Church
 - The Gentiles aren't the natural tree God planted, but He grafted us into tree by faith in the covenant given to Israel
 - So we receive our nourishment, spiritually speaking, from the Jewish nation
 - We owe our very spiritual life to the Jewish people
- As does Ruth, who in faith and love recognized her relationship with this Jewish woman was her only lifeline to the God of Israel
 - And we are Ruth
 - Gentiles spiritually attached to Israel by our faith in the Redeemer of Israel
 - As Paul says in Ephesians

Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Eph. 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Eph. 2:15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

Eph. 2:16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Eph. 2:17 and He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;

Eph. 2:18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

- The Church and Israel are united by faith in a common God

- Paul is not saying that the Church and Israel become the same entity or that we replace Israel
- Paul clearly teaches here and elsewhere that Israel remains distinct from the Church
- Even as believing Jews are welcomed into the Body of Christ today, yet still a nation of Israel remains on earth
- One of the best pieces of evidence for the ongoing distinction between Israel and the Church is the symbology in the story of Ruth itself
 - When Ruth comes to know and follow Naomi's God, do Ruth and Naomi merge into a single person?
 - Or does Ruth replace Naomi in the story, pushing her out of the way?
 - No
 - The two remain distinct but are united spiritually by faith and love for the same God
- For the Jew, the idea of Gentiles sharing in the promises God gave to Israel is very difficult to accept
 - Jews long rejected the possibility that a Gentile could ever share in the blessings of the kingdom
 - And this difficulty is even reflected in the story of Ruth
 - Consider how Naomi at first resisted Ruth's desire to follow her home to Israel
 - Only after Ruth pledged her devotion to Naomi's side in v.18 did Naomi relent
 - Similarly, the Jewish apostles of the early church struggled with the same idea
 - At one point, the apostles gathered to decide whether God intended to allow Gentiles to enter into the Church

Acts 15:6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

[Acts 15:8](#) "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;
[Acts 15:9](#) and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

- It's strange for us to consider that the early church leaders doubted whether Gentiles were part of God's plan
- That's how radical this step was for the Jewish people
- That's how radical Ruth's decision to return is, even in her day
- But now the time has come for Naomi to return and Ruth to accompany her
 - That time is the time of the barley harvest

[Ruth 1:22](#) So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- The time of harvest becomes the backdrop for the events of chapter 2
- Next week, we return to our first story, to Naomi and Ruth again
- We learn what happens as they come back to a land of plenty, yet without husbands