

Ruth #1

November 12, 2023

Series Title: Ruth: Painful Providence and Sovereign Grace

Today's Message: Painful Providence and Sovereign Grace; Ruth 1:1-5

The book of Ruth is a beautiful story. Out of deep pain comes great blessing. From despair comes great joy. From hopelessness comes happiness. Out of famine comes fruitfulness. These contrasts reveal both the painful providence of God and His Sovereign grace.

We don't easily connect the painful experiences in our lives as Christians with the providence of God. So often we recoil at the difficulties and sorrows that come to us in many different ways. When trials come we often despair and leap the conclusion that God is angry with us and that God has forsaken us. It is, however, at these very times we should assume that God is working for us. Yes, He may be pruning, trimming, shaping and molding us through trials, but it is God at work in us working providentially through circumstances.

God's providence is painful. But you must understand and believe that God is sovereignly ruling over your life through providential acts in order to work all things out for your good and His glory in accordance with His good will and pleasure!

Whether Naomi and Ruth learned this lesson of God's providence and sovereignty, we must. We must read the book of Ruth with this theme in mind and learn from it! These stories in the Old Testament are written both to encourage us and to warn us. In other words, they are written to push us toward faithful perseverance, as Paul writes in Romans 15:4, where he says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. We will certainly do this as we study Ruth.

But Paul also writes that the OT Scriptures are also written to warn us. Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church, tells us why stories like these, and others, are written in the Old Testament. He says in 1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

So, here is at least one thing, one principle I want you to learn and put into practice: When painful trials come into your life, you will believe that God is the providential working His sovereign will for your good and His glory. William Cowper wrote a famous hymn entitled, "God Moves in Mysterious Ways." In that hymn he penned these beautiful verses:

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
 He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.
 Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill
 He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.
 Ye fearful saints fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.
 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.
 His purposes will ripen fast unfolding every hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.
 Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.

These words capture that desire I have for you and me to understand and accept the providential working of God and look for His Sovereign grace to be exercised in the lives even with life is bleak and void of cheerful expectation. Such was the case for Naomi, but in the end history reveals that out of the brokenness came blessing.

As we study the book of Ruth it is my hope that from the beginning you will feel for Naomi, be happy for Ruth, rejoice in Boaz and praise the Lord for both His painful providence and His Sovereign grace!

I. The Setting of the book of Ruth

- A. We will follow the later timeline for the book of Ruth
 1. Ruth takes place in approximately 1126-1105 B.C. during the leadership of Jair
 - a) Jair is mentioned in Judges 10:3-5
 - b) After Jair the Israelites were subject to the Philistines and Ammonites for 18 years. (see Judges 10:6-8)
 - c) About the time Jair ended his time of rule, Eli the priest would have been taking office. This puts us at 1107 B.C. and the Philistine subjection was just beginning.
 - d) After Eli served as priest for about 60 years, Samuel served as both prophet and priest from approximately 1067-1020 B.C.
 - (1) During Samuel's rule Saul became King, and eventually David became king of Israel.
 - e) This is a reasonable timeline because Ruth 4:17 tells us that Ruth was David's great grandmother.
- B. A Comparative Contrast between the book of Ruth and of the book of Judges
 1. Judges is dark and dismal, while Ruth is bright with spiritual light and Messianic hope.
 2. Comparative Contrast between the book of Ruth and the book of Judges
 - a) Ruth reveals purity while Judges reveals immorality
 - b) Ruth demonstrates a pursuit of the True God; Judges the pursuit of idols
 - c) Ruth: Devotion; Judges: Disloyalty
 - d) Ruth: Love; Judges: Lust
 - e) Ruth: Peace; Judges: War
 - f) Ruth: Kindness; Judges: Cruelty
 - g) Ruth: Obedience leading to blessing; Judges: disobedience to punishment
 - h) Ruth: Righteousness; Judges: Rebellion
 - i) Ruth: Redemption; Judges: Oppression
 - j) Ruth: Faithfulness of a foreigner; Judges: Faithlessness of the "chosen."
- C. Ruth's Background
 1. Many ancient rabbis thought that Ruth was a daughter or descendent of the Moabite King, Eglon. (Ruth Rabbah). Many modern commentators reject this.
 - a) Eglon was the son of Balak, the king of Moab when Balaam prophesied

D. Warnings and Encouragements

1. The book of Judges warns that the craving of evil things, and the things God hates leads to misery, sorrow, subjection and judgment.
2. The book of Ruth teaches us that discerning good from evil, and then acting in faith toward what is good and pure is pleasing to God.
 - a) Ruth believed in Naomi's God and left everything to follow Naomi and to serve her God.
 - (1) I believe Ruth had faith in the One True and Living God.

II. (1:1-2) Living in Terribly Troubling Times

A. "In the days when the judges ruled..." Or, "...when the judges judged..."

1. It was bitter time, a time of trouble
 - a) A repetitive sequence of sin, sorrow, judgment and repentance
2. It was a dark time in Israel
 - a) "In those days Israel had no king and every man did what was right in his own eyes."
 - (1) Lawlessness; ungodliness; waywardness
 - (2) Proverbs 19:15 says: "Indolence (slothfulness) casts into a deep sleep."
 - (a) Israel fell into a spiritual sleep in those days!

B. Famine in the land

1. Of Food
 - a) Bethlehem: "House of Bread" was suffering a famine
 - b) Apparently, all Israel was suffering from a famine
2. Of Word
 - a) If "in those days every man did what was right in his own eyes," and if in Eli's time the Word of the Lord was scarce (see 1 Samuel 3:1), it stands to reason that there was scarcity of the ministry of the word of the Lord.
3. A consequence of sin
 - a) For example: 1 Kings 17:1 tells us God sent a famine in the days of Elijah. In those days Israel was serving the Baals and God. Detestable
 - (1) We can't do both. God won't stand for it!

C. A Questionable Move to Moab

1. I imagine a Jewish audience would be shocked with this information.
 - a) Moabites were *related* by way of Lot (See Genesis 19:36-37)
 - b) But the Moabite women were especially dangerous because, apparently, their beauty was irresistible for Israelite men.
 - (1) Numbers 25:1-5: The men indulged in adultery and idolatry
 - (a) Our world has mastered the art of seduction.
 - (i) What seductive influences have caught you?
2. A move to a land of total depravity because of their worship of false gods
 - a) Their gods were powerful Demonic, evil spirits serving Satan
 - (1) Baal— sexual, fertility
 - (2) Ashtoreth— war and fertility
 - (3) Chemosh— sexual; fertility; required human sacrifice, 2 Ki.3:27

- b) Sadly, Solomon imported the worship of these gods. He set up high places for his many wives. As they worshiped, so did the people. (1 Kings 11:7-8)

(1) But, as we will see, rather than hold to her gods, Ruth forsook them and worshiped the God of Israel!

- (a) Repentance is expected of God's people. Take warning from the OT, repent from loving the world and God.
 - (i) If you love the world you are
 - (a) An enemy of God (James 4:4)
 - (b) Missing the love of God (1 Jn.2:15)
 - (ii) Repent. The Lord will hear your prayer. (Ps. 34:4)
- 3. Be cautious in making decisions.
 - a) Be biblical. Let God's word test the wisdom of your plan.
 - b) Be prayerful
 - c) Be obedient in action. Take action. But be faithful to God and His word.

III. (1:3-5) A Painful Providence

- A. Death comes to Naomi's house
 - 1. Her husband, Elimelech
 - 2. Her sons, Mahlon and Kilion
 - a) The book of Ruth does not tell us why the men died. We can only speculate.
- B. Looking forward to coming events in Ruth
 - 1. The events in the book of Ruth lead us to see the Invisible but Sovereign hand of God at work.
 - a) A Famine led Elimelech's family to Moab
 - b) Ruth's marriage to Mahlon (4:10) knitted her heart to Naomi
 - c) The death that made Ruth a widow will lead to her redemption through Boaz
 - d) Poverty in Moab and God's renewed provision in Judah, moved Naomi to return to Bethlehem. Ruth's love for Naomi moved her to go with her. (Ruth 1:16-18)
 - e) All the troubles became openings for God to bring Ruth into the land of Israel through her kinsman redeemer, where she became a link in the line of Messiah!
 - 2. What must we learn as we face hardships of various kinds?
 - a) Learn the ways and mind of God!
 - (1) Isaiah 55:9: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."
 - b) Learn the power of God!
 - (1) Romans 8:28-29: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be **conformed to the likeness of His Son...**"

c) Learn the plan of God!

- (1) Philippians 1:6: "...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."