

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

THE STORY OF RUTH

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ruth 1.1-9 | September 8, 2019

Prepared by Rev. Curtis A. Bronzan
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This week we begin a new 7-week series in the Old Testament book of Ruth. Mistakenly perceived as a mere Disney-like fairytale where everyone lives happily ever after, Ruth has much to teach us about how God works amidst our chaos and confusion. In our Bibles, this short 85-verse story connects Judges – a politically and spiritually tumultuous time of violence, anarchy and famine – with 1st Samuel – which describes King David’s rise to power.

As one author explains, “In the midst of religious, moral, and societal collapse, God had not forgotten or withdrawn his redemptive plan. In all the apostasy and degeneracy, God was at work in the least likely circumstances and people to accomplish his purpose. Ruth gives hope when all hope seems lost.”

II. Connecting with One Another

When have you felt hopeless? What, if anything, brought you hope?

III. Study the Text

a. **Read Ruth 1.1-2.**

The narrator of Ruth covers a lot of ground quickly; the first four verses describe at least 10 years! First, the stage is set: “In the days when judges ruled...” recalls the conclusion of Judges (which echoes Judges 17.6) – “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.” In other words, they turned their backs on God.

How could the conclusion of Judges be applied to our world today?

How have we turned our backs on God?

- b. In addition to experiencing military invasions, governmental collapse, and foreign oppressors as described in Judges, there was “a famine in the land” (this is the land that was supposed to flow with milk and honey – see Exodus 3.1-8).

While the author of Ruth doesn’t make an explicit connection, do you think this famine was connected to the people’s unfaithfulness? If so, why?

When have you felt tempted to flee a difficult situation (whether you did so or not)?

- c. Adding insult to injury, Bethlehem means “house of bread.” This family, led by Elimilech (whose name means “my God is King”), fled the famine by traveling to Moab, sworn enemies of Israel who worshiped the evil pagan god Chemosh and descended from an inappropriate union between Lot and his eldest daughter.

After fleeing famine, this family is now living amongst their fiercest rivals as immigrants. How do you think this went? Why?



d. Read Ruth 1.3-5.

In verse 5, English translations read, "Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband." In Hebrew, however, her name is not used – it simply reads "the woman," underscoring her difficult if not demeaned role in an ancient society without a husband or heir. One author explains, "Once the men are wiped from the story, there is no story. This is where the Bible begs to differ with the world's way of devaluing women."

Why is it important that both women and men understand that the Bible "begs to differ with the world's way...?"

- e. Perhaps in part because these verses occur so quickly, readers can pass over Naomi's suffering. Instead, it's been argued, we should see her as a "female Job" (she has it worse actually, as an unwed female immigrant in a patriarchal culture).

How does seeing Ruth as a "female Job" change your perception of the story?

How does seeing the narrative in this light put God at the center?

How have your own struggles and losses shaped your understanding of God?

- f. The Bible repeatedly speaks openly and honestly about the suffering of God's people instead of concealing these difficult stories. *Why do you think that is?*

g. Read Ruth 1.6-9.

What prompts the idea to "return home"?

The Hebrew word *shūv* is translated in verse 6 as "return," then used again in 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, and 22. While English speakers don't always appreciate such obvious repetition, reading in the Hebrew gives a distinct feel for the meaning of the story. *At this point, what do you think it is?*

- h. It's been said that "when trouble comes to our lives, we can endure it, escape it, or enlist it." *What do you think that means? Do you agree?*

How can our questions draw us toward God instead of pushing us away?

- i. While all three women initially *shūv* toward Judah (verse 7), Naomi encourages them to *shūv* toward their childhood homes.

Why do you think she does so? What motivates her statement?

- j. *What one thing have these verses impressed upon you that are meaningful in your own spiritual journey this week?*

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up this series, that through it we would rediscover the God who is not only sovereign, but good, and that our lives might reflect His goodness to those in need,
b. Ask for God's blessing on our Wednesday Night programs, as we seek to "pass the baton" of faith to the next generation of children, youth, and young adults,
c. Pray for those around the world, reeling from the effects of war, famine, disease and disasters.

