

Ruth 1v1-5

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Preacher: David Hills

[0 : 00] Tell me a story, Daddy. I can't tell you how many times I heard that when my two sons were young.

Usually at bedtime. And it was usually after they were tucked in that I would begin. I would start with a story of once upon a time there was a little boy named Arvid who lived deep in the forest with his mother and father in a little log cabin.

And from there the story would go on in different directions, but it always began that same way. And the stories, at least parts of the stories, were based on stories that my own dad had told me about growing up in the wilds of northern Ontario in Canada.

Why do they love stories so much? But we tell stories as adults too. Stories of the past. Stories of battles won and lost or fought.

Fought and won or lost. In the job. In the office. Or elsewhere. And instead of saying this is how we do something, we'll often tell a story.

[1 : 09] The story will explain why. It'll tell us how we got to where we are. And it often teaches lessons. And it's far more memorable that way.

But again, why do we love stories so much? In part, I think it's because we're made in the image of God. God is the consummate storyteller.

Just look at the Bible. It contains story after story. From the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. To the book of Revelation. And the story of the return of Christ.

We see God revealing himself through his interactions with people. Through stories. We see stories that tell of his love. Of what we lost in the Garden of Eden.

The fall of man. We see God's plan to save those who came to him. Save them from a debt that we owe. For the crime of treason against God himself.

[2 : 09] And we see the joys that await those who trust in God through his son Jesus Christ. Now God could have chosen simply to tell us in a very straightforward text narrative.

But he chose to do so much of this through stories. True stories. Of real people. With real flaws. And real failings. Today we begin seven weeks looking at the story of a woman who loses everything.

Her home. Her husband. Her sons. And she's left only with a daughter-in-law. A foreign daughter-in-law. In a time.

In a land. Where women. And especially foreign women. Really needed the care and protection of a father. A husband. Or a son. And we'll see a story of redemption and restoration.

Through an amazing set of circumstances. The book of Ruth is a short book in the Old Testament. And it talks of poverty. It talks of the care of a young daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law.

[3 : 11] It speaks of responsibility. Of duty. Of integrity. And it shows us in story form. How God demonstrates his love to us. The story of Ruth begins in Bethlehem.

A small village in the province of Judah. It moves immediately to Moab. An adjoining country. But then quickly moves back to Bethlehem. As we'll see. Only a couple of generations have passed. Since God led the Israelites out of Egypt. To the land of Canaan. To the promised land. To a land that God himself had promised to Abraham. And to his descendants. A place of rest.

The land was to be a glorious land. A land flowing with milk and honey. A pure land. Purged of the false gods and the wicked people who worshipped those idols.

A place where the people exclusively worshipped the one true God. But the Israelites became distracted. Rather than driving out the inhabitants as God commanded.

[4 : 14] They became involved with the people. They began to worship the false gods of the land. To the point where they were sacrificing their own children. To the stone idols of the Canaanites.

Others were distracted from worshipping God. Simply by the worries of their day to day lives. Rather than being a pure and holy land. Where God ruled his people. It became a land of troubles. God allowed calamities. To descend on his people. Troubles from within. And enemies from without. Verse 1 tells us that the story takes place in the time of the judges.

The book of Judges immediately precedes Ruth in the Old Testament. And it describes a period of time when the people were supposed to be looking to God for leadership. He had given their parents this new land.

But time and again the Israelites forgot God and turned their backs on him. And God in keeping with his promise.

[5 : 15] And his warnings. Allowed calamity to fall. In the form of often of outside invaders. The Israelites would then cry out to God for rescue. And he would send a judge.

A hero. Who would defeat the enemy. And bring the people back to him. But then the cycle would begin again. And again.

And again. It was a time of growing anarchy. A time of lawlessness. A time when outside nations invaded and carried off the wealth of the land. A time when people turned their backs on God.

Forgetting all that he had done for them. The last verse of the book of Judges is really telling. In those days there was no king in Israel. And everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

In this setting then we find the story of Elimelech and Naomi. Of Ruth and Boaz. It's a story of tragedy and loss. Of redemption and inheritance. Of self-interest and dereliction of duty.

[6 : 15] Of sacrifice and righteous reward. Of abject poverty. And of eternal riches. You know Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet. Has.

Juliet asks the question. What's in the name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Usually we don't think a lot about names. But names are important.

We have our given names. Usually given to us by our parents. Our family names. Which may have a historical or geological. Geographical significance.

Some of us even. Are given names in the school play yard. Those of us with children. Usually think very carefully. Before we give our children names.

Is there an important name in the family? A father. A mother. An aunt. A grandparent maybe. Does the name have a special meaning? Do you like the way it sounds? You know sometimes there are other considerations.

[7 : 14] When. Before our first son was born. A wise older woman suggested. That we take any potential name. To the rear of our house. To the back door.

And yell it. Really loudly. Ten times. And then decide whether or not we still like that name. I think that was wise advice. But let's look at the characters in this story.

And several of them have very interesting names. First there's Elimelech. He's the father. He's the husband. He's the decision maker. His name literally means.

My God is king. A wonderful name to give a child. Obviously his parents were very devout people. Worshipers of God. Honoring the one who gave them their land.

And their characters. Next we have Naomi. Elimelech's wife. Her name means pleasantness. It also sometimes means sweet sounding music.

[8 : 09] And today we might call her Melody. A beautiful name. But next week we're going to see that. When she returns to Bethlehem. She asks to be called Marah.

Which means bitterness or sourness. It's interesting that the. The name was spelled. Slightly differently. In Exodus 15. Is a homonym for the desert spring.

Where the Israelites. While searching for fresh water in the desert. Came upon a spring with bitter waters. It was also a place. Where God miraculously turned those bitter waters.

Into sweet waters. And we'll see that pattern of bitterness. To sweetness. Repeated in the book of Ruth. Next we have two sons. Malon and Kilion. Malon.

Means sickness. And Kilion. Means consumption. A disease today that we would call tuberculosis. Can you imagine naming your two children. That.

[9 : 08] These are my two sons. This one over here. This is sickness. And this one over here. Don't get too close to him. He's tuberculosis. But on the other hand. They do both die young.

Old enough to marry. But too young to have had any children of their own. We meet Orpah. And Ruth. These are the wives of Malon and Kilion.

Now they're Moabite. Moabite names. Mentioned only in the book of Ruth. And they. Because they're not Hebrew names. Don't have any specific Hebrew meaning. And to be honest. I don't know enough about the language of Moab. To be able to tell you if the Moabites consider them to have any special names. But. But. We.

There. There are no. There's no. Nothing specific to these names. But getting back to the story. What's a good story without some irony. Without some plot twists. Without tension.

[10:04] Well we'll see plenty. Here. First we're told that this is the time. Of the judges. Excuse me. As we've already mentioned.

There is no king in Israel. Each man is doing what's right in his own eyes. Amid a downward spiral of anarchy, lawlessness, and sin. And yet Elimelech.

The father in this story. Is named my God is king. His name points to God. Which is where he should have been looking all along. Where all of us should be looking.

But ironically when difficulty comes. He takes matters into his own hands. And does what's right in his own eyes. And takes the family to Moab. It's also interesting to note that Elimelech comes from Bethlehem.

Now in Hebrew. Bethlehem literally means the house of bread. It was famous. It was the famous bread basket. Of Judah. Famous for its grain. Especially the wheat and the barley.

[11:09] And yet there was a famine. Famine in the house of bread. An odd irony. In the book of Judges. We see that the enemies attacked him. Would carry off the harvest.

Frequently. So was this. Famine man-made. Or was it a natural. Failure of the harvest. We don't know. But there was a famine nonetheless.

The final irony really is that Elimelech flees the land of God's rest. The land of promise. The land of his provision. The land of his inheritance. In search of rest and provision elsewhere.

Elimelech leaves his land. His home. And takes his family to Moab. A place that has had a long and ignominious history. In opposition to Israel.

And to God. In Genesis. We learn that Moab was the son. Of Abraham's nephew Lot. Now God saved Lot. And his daughters. From the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And immediately thereafter.

[12:09] Lot's daughters. Get Lot drunk. And seducing. The son of the elder daughter. Was named Moab. The man who literally became.

The father of his country. In Exodus. We see the leaders of Moab. Refusing to sell. Even bread and water. To the children of Israel. As they were. Wandering in the desert.

And number 22. Tells us that Moab hired Balaam. A prophet for hire. To curse the Israelites. But God told Balaam. To bless Israel instead.

And he did so. In number 25. We read. That the Israelite men. Were led away from God. By Moabite women. Who again. Seduced them.

To worship. Their own gods. Because of all this. In Deuteronomy 23. God forbids. Any Moabite. From entering the assembly of Israel. The tabernacle. Forever.

[13:06] And Judges 3. Tells us the story of Eglon. The obese king of Moab. Who subjugated Israel. For 18 years. Now it's possible. That this story.

Of Ruth. Began either. Before. After. Or during. That reign of Eglon. The text doesn't say. But Judges 3.

Speaks of Ehud. The judge. Who rescues his people. By assassinating Eglon. A favorite story. Of small boys. Who like gory stories. I won't go into details.

Elimelech though. Whose name again. Means. My God is king. Chooses Moab. A wicked land. Over Israel. God's land. But God's land. Where the people.

Had turned their backs. On God. Is there much of a difference? Maybe not. But there. He takes his family. And there he dies.

[14:03] Leaving Naomi a widow. But still. She had her sons. To support her. And there they stayed. She finds wives. For the husbands. And then the sons die.

Leaving Naomi's saddle. With two. Moabite. Daughter-in-laws. What do you do? Well. We're only to verse five. And we have three and a half. Chapters to go.

So we should see. There's a lot to see. On the other hand though. The question comes up. Why should we even care? This all happened. Three thousand years ago. What possible significance.

Could it have to us today? Is it really just one more story. From ancient Israel. That has a moral content? And if so. What is that moral message? Well actually.

There are three. Important strings. And three important areas. First of all. This story. Is in the main line. Of the story of the Bible. The Old Testament.

[15:03] Tells us of creation. Of the fall of man. Of the slavery of sin. And the promise of a redeemer. The redeemer. The redeemer. Would be a prophet. Priest.

And king. Who would complete. What Adam failed to do. He would be one. Who would live a perfect life. He would be one. Who would come to pay. The penalty of sin. That we all owe. He would be one. Who would crush the serpent. Restore a right relationship. Between God and man. And draw all nations to God. God promised. That redeemer. Would be a son of Adam. A son of Abraham. Of Abraham. Isaac. And Jacob. A son of Judah. And then later. He promised. It would be a son of David.

Now in some places. The Bible. Just plainly. States the promise. Isaiah 53. For example. In other places. The Old Testament. Speaks in images. In pictures. In types.

[16:00] In stories. In the book of Ruth. We see an outsider. With no claim. On the benefits. Of God's covenant. With his people. Brought into the family.

Redeemed. And given a place. Not only in Israel. But in the very family line. Of Jesus himself. Many years later. Long after the time of David.

The prophet Micah. Prophesized. But you. O Bethlehem Ephrathah. Who are too little. To be among the clans of Judah. From you. Shall come forth. For me. The one who is to be ruler. In Israel. Whose coming forth. Is from old. From ancient days. In Matthew 1. We have the royal lineage. Of Jesus. It runs from Abraham.

Through David. To Joseph. The husband of Mary. To Jesus. Who was born. In Bethlehem. In that genealogy. There are four women. Tamar.

[16:56] The daughter-in-law. Of Judah. Is a non-Israelite. Who was honorable. In her dealings. With Judah. After the husband died. Rahab.

Who is actually. Boaz's mother. And Boaz. We'll meet in another week or two. Saved the Israelite spies. In Jericho. Before God brought them. Into the land.

Ruth. Is the. The hero. Of this story. And then the last. Is the wife of Uriah. Uriah. The Hittite. Another foreigner. We know her.

As Bathsheba. Who became the wife. Of King David. And the mother. Of King Solomon. Each of these women. Was a foreigner. Who was brought. Into the covenant. Of Israel. From the outside. Their mention. By name. I think. Shows. God's active role. In bringing all people. Groups. To himself. Through Christ. And finally. It's important. For us. To realize. That.

[17:53] God's plans. Are not always. Always. Obvious. We often hear. The question. Where is God. In times of trouble. And why does God. Let bad things happen. And the first.

Five verses. Of Ruth. Are certainly. Filled with trouble. God's ways. Are not our ways. He sees. A bigger picture. He is. The bigger picture.

He has. A plan. For his creation. Written. Before the beginning. Of time. Paul. In Romans 8. 28. Says. And we know. That for those. Who love God. All things. Work together.

For good. For those. Who are called. According to his purpose. We rarely. See everything. There is to see. We don't know. The ends. Of our own story. Especially.

When we're facing. Trials. But God does. At this point. In the story. Naomi. Is grieving. She has. No idea. What God. Has in store. And while.

[18:47] At the end. Of the book. She sees. Her inheritance. Redeemed. Ruth. Her daughter-in-law. Remarried. She holds. Her grandson. Her son. Yet. Naomi.

Doesn't see. A greater story. The greater glory. A great. Great. Grandson. David. Who becomes. The king. Of Israel. Just as we don't see. The true end. Of our story.

Neither. Does Naomi. But praise the Lord. God knows. The beginning. From the end. He is never surprised. But holds. All things. In the palm. Of his hand. And even.

Beyond. King David. Naomi. Does not see. The ultimate end. Her descendant. The promised son. The wonderful counselor. The mighty God.

The everlasting father. The prince of peace. The king of kings. And lord of lords. The holy one. Who gives his life. As a ransom. For many. Who is raised. Triumphly.

[19 : 42] By the holy spirit. And who is seated. In glory. Reigning forever. Who is preparing. The church. As his bride. Clothing her. In his righteousness. Beloved forever.

Let us pray.