



river west church

Radical Step of Faith

Ruth 1:6-22

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A Tragedy Beyond Belief

The Book of Ruth begins with tragedy. Don't rush past the first paragraph. Let it soak in. The power of the story is the transformation that takes place from the opening lines to the final verses. This is a magnificent story of redemption and new creation. But the impact comes only as we see how great that redemption really is. In order to do that, we have to fully enter into the pain of the opening paragraph. Read it again. Do you get the message? Naomi lost EVERYTHING.

A Heart Wounded Beyond Measure

Read the first paragraph of the story and you'll get the facts laid out; a cold, stark, brutal report of what took place. Read the rest of the first chapter and you will see inside Naomi's soul. You will feel the anguish of her heart and overhear the dark thoughts that filled her mind. Bitterness is a key theme. Naomi's heart is broken, bitter, and bereft. She is aching through and through. Her thoughts line up with her emotions. Her mind is filled with troubling thoughts about God. It's not just that she has questions about God. She has come to some conclusions. Her mind tells her that God is against her. God isn't just passive and distant; God has forgotten her. It's brutal. She believes that God has stretched out His hand to ruin her life.

Feel the pain of Naomi's heart. Understand the darkness of her thoughts about God. Once you get that, you're ready to understand the radical step of faith Naomi was about to take.

A Radical Step of Faith

At the very lowest point, when all was lost, that's exactly when Naomi made the most important decision of her life. That's when she stood up and started moving, to return to the land of Judah. That she did this is amazing. But the REASON she did this is even more amazing: "she heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them bread." (1:6). Amazing, isn't it! Even after everything that happened to her, and in the midst of all her pain and troubled thoughts about God, Naomi still believed.

Something deep inside of Naomi stirred. There was something rooted deep in her heart, deeper than all the pain and troubling thoughts. It wasn't just that there was bread in Judah. It was more than that. God had visited His people – that's what she heard, way off in the fields of Moab. And she believed it.

Somehow, Naomi's faith was rooted in something greater than her own feelings or personal experience. You can see this revealed in her actions. In verse 8, she pronounces a blessing on her daughters in law, in the name of the God of Israel. Why? Why not dump that God, who hurt her so? Why not bless them in the name of the gods of Moab? Why not give up faith in any kind of god, period?

So, what about Ruth? She decides to leave EVERYTHING and go with Naomi, back to Judah. Why? She wants Naomi's God to be her God. Why? Isn't this the God who abandoned Naomi at best, and actively hurt her at worst? Why leave everything to follow him? Remember that Ruth not only pledges herself to stay with Naomi for life, she also pledges herself to the God of Israel, Naomi's God. Why?

These are the questions we will wrestle with in our study today. The answers are for you and me. The answers are windows into the Gospel of Christ; how it actually works in our world and in our lives.

Return

A key theme of the passage is “to return.” This word is used 11 times in Verses 6-22. In this passage, Naomi makes the crucial decision to return from Moab. Ruth makes the crucial decision to return with Naomi. This return requires faith, a radical kind of faith (for both of these women). This return requires an action step. It means taking a risk; risking it all. The “return” is the turning point of the story, because without this crucial step there would be no amazing ending!

Through all the tragedy, pain, doubt, and fear, the story moves forward because God is at work even in the darkest moments AND because both Naomi and Ruth take a radical step of faith. What about you and me? This is to be our story too.