

“Dealing with the Unexpected”
Ruth 1:1-5
(Preached at Trinity, January 24, 2016)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As you know, my practice of preaching since I began my tenure as your senior pastor has been the ancient practice of *lectio continua* – “continuous exposition” or preaching a series of messages through entire books of Bible. This evening we begin a new book. Leaving the Book of Jonah we now turn to the Book of Ruth. Both are short at only four chapters. Both are historic narratives. Both are told skillfully by the storyteller that we can merely refer to as the “narrator.”
 2. The Book of Ruth finds its place in the midst of the Book of Judges, before the period when the kings ruled Israel—roughly 1500-1100 BC. The book opens:
Ruth 1:1 NAU - "Now it came about in the days when the judges governed"
 3. It was a horrible period in the history of Israel, a time when evil and corruption continued to plague the nation. We saw the pattern as we went through the Book of Judges. Israel would fall into corruption and forget God. God would raise up an enemy to oppress them, and Israel would cry out for relief. God would raise up a deliverer, one of the judges, but as soon as the judge died Israel would return to their wicked idolatry.
 4. The Book of Ruth shows us that even in the midst of such corruption God was active in the midst of His people. His purpose of accomplishing the redemption of His people through Christ was always behind His purpose upon the earth.
 5. The Book of Ruth is a love story between a Moabitess named Ruth and an Israelite named Boaz. It testifies to trust, fidelity, compassion, mercy and kindness, and love. It will point us ultimately to the love of Christ as the Redeemer of His people.
 6. The Book of Ruth displays the sovereignty of God. We can see God’s hand throughout, from the famine forcing Elimelech and his family to leave Judah, to the death of Elimelech leaving Naomi desolate, to the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. God is always at work in the midst of His people. At the end of the Book of Ruth we will see that Ruth and Boaz will bear a son named Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, the greatest of the kings, and directly in the lineage of our Lord.
- I. We begin with the introduction of a family
- A. They are called out by name
 1. It is a reminder of God’s superintending care
 2. There is a husband, his wife, and two sons
Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and two sons Chilion and Mahlon.

3. What's in a name?
Remember, in the Hebrew mind names were important.
 - a. Names really have little significance for us – except to distinguish Bob from Bill, and Julie from Jill
Many today try to be trendy, but there really isn't any substantive significance. It's mostly about parental preference.
 - b. But in the Hebrew mind the name was at the heart of the individual.
 - c. God's name is synonymous with God. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The phrase "My Name" is found 111 times. God says of Solomon in 1 Chron. 22 – "He shall build a house for My name."

- B. Each person in this family had a unique name
 1. Elimelech is from two Hebrew words – Eli and Melech
Eli means God and melech means king = "God is King"
This is interesting in light of the age in which he lived
Judges 21:25 NAU - "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
 2. Elimelech is married to a woman named Naomi – Her name means "pleasant, delightful, or lovely"
At the beginning everything in her life was delightful. She had a fine marriage to a fine Godly man, or at least he had a Godly name.
A warning to our young people: beware of only looking at outward things.
 3. They have two sons, although they appeared frail from birth.
 - a. The name of one is Mahlon – "weak or sickly"
 - b. Their second son is Chilion – "failing" or "Complete, finished"
This could refer to Chilion as also sickly or an expression that Chilion completed their family.
 - c. Naomi's delightful life was already showing signs of difficulty
 4. And then there are two daughter-in-laws
 - a. Orpah – "stubborn or obstinate" – it reveals her heart to the end
 - b. Ruth – "friendship" – testified clearly in her faithfulness to Naomi

II. The unexpected circumstances of life

- A. Naomi's life took a series of unexpected turns – from pleasant to bitter.
No one could have predicted the turn of events
 1. After Naomi and Elimelech married they surely had plans for a happy life together. They were probably an affluent, influential family.
Points of evidence:
 - a. Some say this is the meaning of **Verse 2**. Ephrata was an ancient name for Bethlehem. This could mean they were from the old class – the aristocrats
 - b. Naomi referred to her life when she left Bethlehem
Ruth 1:21 NAU - "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty" – The word for "full" means "abundance"

- c. And this family was well known among the citizens of Bethlehem Naomi was not a nobody. When she returned years later it was the talk of the town.
Ruth 1:19 NAU - "And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"
2. But then Naomi gave birth to two frail sons—probably sickly from birth. This might explain why they both died in early adulthood
 3. Then a severe famine struck the land and Elimelech determines that his family should leave Judah and sojourn in the land of Moab. They were forced to leave their comfortable life in Bethlehem.
 4. Then, instead of her sons taking wives from among the tribes of Israel, they married women of Moab. This would have caused great grief to their parents.
 - a. We can see this with Esau's marriages outside of God's covenant people.
Genesis 26:34-35 NAU - "When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵ and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah."
 - a. Of Samson's parents we read:
Judges 14:3 NAU - "Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"
 5. Naomi could not have imagined the turn her life took when she lost her husband and then her sons while dwelling in a foreign land among the Moabites.
 6. Her delightful life had turned bitter
Ruth 1:20 NAU - "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."
- B. No one ever expects the tragedies of life. Our expectation of a good life is testimony to the goodness of God.
1. No one expects a debilitating accident or failing health
 2. No one expects the loss of a job and financial hardships
 3. No one expects wayward children or a difficult marriage
 4. No one expects the death of a loved one
- C. This is where our theology is important
1. Our circumstances of life are not by accident. And they are not without purpose
 2. Elimelech surely must have despised the famine, but God's design for it was according to His infinite wisdom and perfect purpose.
 3. Naomi would have never imagined that she would lose her beloved husband and her two sons in this foreign land.
 4. God's design however is perfect
Romans 8:28 NAU - "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

5. This doesn't mean we pretend our circumstances are not without difficulty and that difficult times are not sorrowful.
 - a. Notice also it says, "And we know that all things work together for good"
It doesn't say we "feel" all things to be good. There are times we feel just the opposite. Nothing feels good about losing a loved one.
 - b. This passage isn't teaching an artificial happiness as if earthly sorrows are not real. And that God is not unaware of our sorrows.
 - c. Heaven will be a place in which the tears will be wiped from our eyes. Earth is not that place.
 - d. The point is you may not perceive the good God is doing.
Romans 8:28 must be received by faith.
 - e. Have your submitted the care of your life to Him?
It is hard for a single woman wanting a mate to trust her future
It is hard for a childless couple to trust their future to God

III. The consequences of our decisions – while God is sovereign over all things He most often works through means. Sometimes our condition of life is of our own making

- A. The Elimelech family made some serious decisions
 1. This story comes under the backdrop of sin. It was during the period of the Judges, a dark time for Israel. We have to assume the famine was God's harsh hand upon His straying people.
Leviticus 26:3-4 NAU - "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, ⁴ then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit."
 2. No doubt the drought was severe. But Elimelech was most likely a man of means. Apparently they left Bethlehem without the company of others. When Naomi returned it appears that she was all alone. It appears that they had left everything behind in Bethlehem
 3. It was no insignificant decision. Elimelech was leading his family from the Promised Land to Moab. God had delivered His people from Egypt and given them the Promised Land. It was there they were meant to make their home. Not Moab.
 - a. The Moabites originated from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his older daughter.
 - b. It was Balak, the king of Moab who hired Balaam to curse Israel when they came out of Egypt.
 - c. It was the Moabite king, Eglon that had more recently oppressed Israel and God raised up the Judge Ehud as the deliverer.
 - d. And the women of Moab had a history of seducing the Israelites to sin.
Numbers 25:1-2 NAU - "While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. ² For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods."

- e. It was here that Elimelech chose to bring his family. He was taking his family away from God's people to dwell among the pagans. This could not have a positive outcome. In spite of his name, "God is King," it would appear that Elimelech was following the course of everyone else in Israel at the time.

Judges 21:25 NAU - "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

4. Elimelech left the people of God and the worship of God in order escape the hardship of the famine. Such decisions are not without consequences. Matthew Henry: "It is an evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God hath set us, and to be for leaving it immediately whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it." The same can be said for modern day church hoppers
5. **Verse 4** tells us that they remained in Moab 10 years. It isn't likely the drought lasted that long? It was a regional drought. Bethlehem is from Moab about the distance of New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Yet, they stayed there 10 years; they had set up their home in Moab.
6. The word for "sojourn" in **Verse 1** describes a temporary residence. Perhaps at the beginning it would only be for a season or two, but they ended up staying in this foreign land.
In **Verse 2** we read: "Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there."
Perhaps Elimelech died soon after entering, but Naomi and her two sons remained.
Never does it go well when we become comfortable in the mist of paganism.
7. Did life in Moab contribute to the death of Elimelech? What about the two sickly sons.?
8. Elimelech's decision to move to Moab meant marriageable girls for his sons were also left behind. This led to their marriage to pagan women. It would appear that Orpah remained committed to the gods of the Moabites.
So much for the assumption that we can convert our mates.
Ruth 1:15 NAU - "Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

- B. Our decisions often cause us unexpected hardship. Sometimes our actions have unintended results. Sometimes they have long-term consequences.
1. Young ladies seeking a mate are prone to settle for whatever is available. They sometimes give up the best years of their eligibility courting a guy that is not marriage material.
 2. A career move to another town without regard for a church has often brought spiritual decay. Seldom do people receive counsel on this. The green pastures of Moab are often too enticing. Pastors seem to be the only ones who move with a particular church in mind.
 3. Young men today squander the important years of their twenties. It's hard to get started when you're in your thirties.
 4. There are endless health consequences to life's decisions

- C. Elimelech's decision to move was based primarily upon the prospects for his comfort.
1. Too often this is our primary motivation in decisions
 2. Instead, our motivation must always be God's Word, His glory, and Christ's Kingdom. This may lead us to hardship, but we will find great delight in the display of God's glory.

Conclusion:

1. Our lives, however, are not merely an endless series of possibilities with the outcome based upon our choices. The Open Theist believes that God is open to endless possibilities and knows all of the variables but doesn't yet know the outcome.
2. The glorious thing about the circumstances of our lives and the outcome of our vast number of decisions is that God has a purpose and a plan and He is carrying it out perfectly. This means that even in the midst of our hardships God's plan is perfect. Even if our suffering is the result of our sinful folly, God's perfect purpose is still marching forward for His glory and our good. We can find great comfort in this.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.