

Ruth (Love Defined)

Sunday, January 21, 2024

As we begin this series in the book of Ruth, I want to take some time to lay the groundwork for our focus.

I would like our study to keep this thought in mind... **LOVE DEFINED**

It seems to me that so much of this book focuses on the issue of love. In fact we often quote from chapter one during wedding ceremonies as an example of marital love.

Ruth 1:16-17

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

But we see other types of love illustrated and defined in this book as well. (What should I look for in the Book of Ruth?)

- The lack of true love in the world
- God's love for us
- Our love for God
- Our love for each other
- The characteristics of what love should look like

Ruth 1

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from

there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

In chapter 1 we are introduced to the main characters of the book of Ruth, but more than that, a picture is painted regarding the atmosphere in which they lived - an atmosphere that lacked LOVE

- **Days when the judges ruled.** (Verse 1)

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

- Wicked and selfish... every man for themselves (did what was right in their own eyes)

Judges 21:25

25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. (did what was right in their own eyes)

- **Horrible atrocities of evil** (especially in chapters 17-21 much of which centered around Bethlehem)
- **Lack of love** (For God, for each other, for righteousness)
- **Really mimics what Jesus and Paul said would characterize the last days**

Matthew 24:12

12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

2 Timothy 3:1-5

3 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

- **Famine in Bethlehem (Verse 1)**

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

- No bread in the house of bread - (I would also say a famine of love... leaving people without something they need to live)

- Death of husbands leaving them alone and without anyone to love and care for them

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

- The hopelessness's and bitterness of Naomi, even casting doubt of any possibility that God loved her or cared for her

Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Bethlehem - The birthplace of "The Love of God"

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.

Barley Harvest - The Barley harvest happened in the spring and is most closely associated with the feast of Passover and First Fruits thus reminding us of the provision of salvation that God's LOVE made available to us. LOVE that breaks the stronghold of the enemy (as God did when he broke the stronghold of Pharaoh over the Israelites and set them free from the bondage of their slavery and as Jesus broke the stronghold of the slavery of sin when He gave his life on the cross for each of us)

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

There is an interesting correlation to Barley and God's Love found in John Chapter 6...

- First, we see it involved in the feeding of the 5000

John 6:1-13

6 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

- Then next day Jesus tells the people (who were looking for more "Barley Bread") that He was the bread of life

John 6:25-35

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰ So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'^[a]"

³² Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴ "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

I point all this out to remind us that if we like Naomi are starving for LOVE, God has more than enough for us today. LOVE DEFINED begins by understanding that God alone is the source for real love. The fake imitations of the world will never give us the nourishment that we need.

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Like Johnny Lee's 1980 hit "Looking for all the wrong places"

*I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places
Lookin' for love in too many faces
Searchin' their eyes, lookin' for traces
Of what I'm dreamin' of
Hoping to find a friend and a lover
I'll bless the day I discover another heart
Lookin' for love*

Elimelek and so many others today are desperately searching for love but in all the wrong places. But we don't have too. Have you heard the good news... Love is defined by what God has done for us Jesus is LOVE DEFINED!