

Take Your Trouble to God

Ruth 1:3-13

For some of you this morning – life is good – we rejoice with you. Listen to today’s sermon, for you may need it tomorrow. For others life is Ok, hard but manageable - Listen to today’s sermon – tomorrow life may become unmanageable. For others of you - you feel broken and shattered, hurt and angry. Yes I know you are here too this morning. If you are in this place this Listen to this sermon – It is for you.

We are continuing in our study of the book of Ruth, called living Above and Beyond – Living a life of *Hesed*. Last week I encouraged you to “Savor the Story,” to recognize the book of Ruth as a biblical narrative with a particular setting, characters, literary devices.

We have two goals this morning. First, to look at the story and understand its movements. We will seek to understand what is happening with the characters and the plot - *so that*, - second - we can transition from understanding the movement of the story to the theological message of the story First the movement of the story – then the message of the story. Let’s start with the movement of the story – in verse 3.

Exposition Ruth 1:2-13 - The Movements of the Story:

Ruth 1:3 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. One of my professors used to say if you preach on suffering you will never lack for an audience. How true that is. You will recall that we said that Ruth is a problem based plot and by this verse we have more problems than we know what to do with. The time of the judges is a bad time, there was a devastating famine that drove Elimelech and his family as refugees to Moab to find food and now

Elimelech is dead. But we are not without hope – Naomi still has her two sons – they will care for their widowed mother as is their duty, and their sons will carry on Elimelech’s name. Verse 4:

Ruth 1:4 And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. After the death of Elimelech this family tries to put the pieces of their life back together – the boys marry and life returns to normal. Regarding the marriage, the author does not comment negatively on this – the law did not prohibit a foreigner from becoming worshiper of Yahweh, which is what seems to have happened with these two women. Notice with me a literary device called telescoping – the author compacts 10 years of normal life into one verse. Why? To communicate that life has returned to normal – the season and the years are passing by, and that we have depth of relationships.

Let me make a brief comment here about our church: We don’t know each other well. Why do I say that? We have only been meeting together for a year – only worshipping for five months and relationships take time to develop. Imagine, just for a moment that we telescope the story of our church and 10 years goes by - just imagine with me the love, and depth of life experience we will have. We will have been in small groups for 10 years, we will have had, certainly, some of our own tragedies that will have bonded us together, as well as great joys – marriages, baptisms, births . As the months and years go by our bonds will deepen with one another. That is exactly what the author is saying here – these are no longer strangers to one another – not longer newly weds, but they are an established family. Verse five.

Ruth 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. Tragedy strikes again into the loving family and we are left breathless. And in the shock, the two primary problems of this book become clear. Problem one – *widows*. Widows in the Old Testament had very little means of providing for themselves and we have three of them - listen to one commentator regarding Naomi: “Noami’s fate is indeed bitter...she cannot

support herself with a trade, because she has none – worse yet, she is an aged widow without children – the worst fate for an Israelite woman.” Hubbard. The first problem is *widows*. The second problem is *extinction*. With no sons and no prospects for future sons – the family name will die out from the face of the earth. “In Israel there was no greater tragedy than for a family to cease to exist.” (Hubbard, 96)

So, the first order of business for these new widows was to try to provide for themselves these newly widowed ladies. **Ruth 1:6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food.** Here we have our first ray of sunshine breaking through the dark clouds. As a reader of the story – we must hold onto this tightly – as a baby grips a soggy pretzel in his little hand – we must not let go of this! If the Lord saw that need and met it – might he also see the needs of these widows and meet them? Hope is in the air – and the three widows start off together. **Ruth 1:7 So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.**

The original plan - we see here, was for the three of them to travel together – to stick together. Of course – they are family – they love each other. But it is while they are on the way that Naomi, it seems, thinks more clearly about the problem of widowhood. The prospects for two young foreign women in Israel are not good. So she says. **Ruth 1:8-9a “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”**

Naomi’s plan is the sensible plan – their extended Moabite family was the best place for them to find rest – or to find security – a new husband. If we want to solve the problem of widowhood for two young women – this is best. Remember that song by the Police? “*When you*

love somebody – set them free.” That is what Naomi is doing. She says since my family is now dead – go back to your family.

After I graduated with my MBA – I looked for a job for 9 months without success. My previous job ended, Trevor was four months old and we had no idea what the future would hold – we had to move out of our apartment where we had been living. Where did we go? Home. Naomi says – your family will take you in and you can rebuild your life from there.

So Naomi blesses them with a blessing of *hesed* verse 8. This is our second ray of hope – That God will show *hesed* to the widows – “May Yahweh the LORD continue to show kindness, faithful love to you, as you have so kindly treated me.” She kisses them and they weep.

But, verse 10, Naomi and Orpah respond with united voices: “No! We will surely return with you to your people.” Oh the love they had for one another! It is hard for people who love one another to separate voluntarily. I remember when we were getting ready to move to Texas on the last day before we moved Tammy had 6 or 7 of her friends over and there were many tears that day – and the hardest thing was seeing my son and his best friend having to say goodbye for the final time. I said, “Lord – I know this is the best plan – but it is really hard!” If you have ever moved away from family – and close friends – remember the tears – you will have the emotional picture.

Naomi meets this emotional response with a logical argument: Ruth 1:11 But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Ruth 1:12 “Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, Ruth 1:13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?

She is shaking them verbally – *wake up!* “We have a problem – you are widows and your best chance for a life is to return home.” And then as if to drive the point home with one powerful argument – Naomi’s laments: No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of

the LORD has gone forth against me.” (13b). The hand of the Lord has struck me – as if I were an enemy. I don’t blame her for that, do you? Her husband is dead, her sons are dead - she has a life of sorrow ahead of her. That is how she feels. You know it is Ok to be honest with God. Don’t be afraid to tell him what you think. God can handle that.

That is the movement of our passage this morning – Of our six characters, three are dead and the other three are widows. Two are sent home just so they can survive. The family line of the main character whose name means “My God is King” is about to become extinct. All of the survivors are in tears of grief. What an encouraging story...

Ah...but it is encouraging – because God is involved! And where God is involved there is hope and life. So, let’s look at the message of the story – it may not jump out at you, but I believe this is where our text must take us are you ready? Here is it... *Take your trouble to God and trust Him again.* In Ruth chapter one we have plenty of trouble and we have people who had trusted God in the past, but now the question is will they trust Him again – after this last disaster?

Let me ask you - what is your trouble? What causes you anxiety? What keeps you up at night? How have you been hurt? What is it that is making you angry this morning? What is your trouble? What burden are you carrying on your back, this morning? Is it heavy? Is it killing you? Why are you carrying it? *Take you trouble to god and Trust Him again.* Why?

1) First, God is sovereign. The key verse is verse six. The Lord stopped the famine – and gave them food. *The insertion of God’s sovereignty in the midst of the tragedy is intentional and highly significant.* God controls nature. God is powerful. God is sovereign over all things. You know sovereignty has fallen on hard times – we don’t really believe God is sovereign any more – things just happen – we’ve come to believe in a God that has taken his hand off the wheel – We think maybe Satan is the one calling the shots. But that is not the God of the Bible – that is not the

God of Ruth - The God we have here is a God that stops a famine in an instant. God is sovereign over the weather, natural disasters, life and death, the large and the small. God is not like the Wizzard of Oz – a weak man behind a curtain pretending to have great power – God does have great power! Take your trouble to Him – because He can do something about it.

The story is told of a prayer meeting during a drought. The people in the church gathered to pray for rain for their crops, which were withering in the hot sun. As they gathered they saw the really only one person truly believed that God was sovereign over the weather – a little boy, the only one who had brought an umbrella!

2) Take your trouble to God and trust Him again – because he is sovereign. But also because **God loves and cares about you.** A sovereign who does not care is a tyrant. A sovereign who does not love is a despot. But this is not the God of the book of Ruth. The God of the book of Ruth in verse six “paid attention to his people’s needs.” He “came to the aid of his people” And brought them relief. Our God is a God of *hesed* – faithful love, loyal love, deep love who Naomi prays will care for the needs of Moabite widows.

Listen to me men and women, boys and girls – if the sovereign God of the universe cares for three Moabite widows – he also cares about your needs – your trouble – the burden you are carrying on your back. So why are we carrying it around? Take that burden off your back and lay it down at the cross.

Well you say – if he is so sovereign and so loving – why didn’t he stop the famine in the first place – why did he allow all these people to die? Why is God allowing the thorn in your side that seems to press deeper every day? We don’t know. God is sovereign, but the author of Ruth gives no explanation for the tragedy. And that is so frustrating to us. *Listen* this is a hard teaching

but you must learn it today – *Our sovereign God does not have to explain Himself to you.* That is the teaching of the book of Job, the Apostle Paul and the story of Ruth.

Last Thursday we were at a funeral of an 11-year old boy our kids have gone to school with the past three years. He was a boy with epilepsy who was left alone in a rare moment and died in a seizure. I so appreciated the pastor who acknowledged the tragedy, he loss real – but he told the grieving congregation that it would be an inadvisable quest to demand from God an explanation – And he is right - because God’s answer to us so often is – . Trust me. I will take care of you. Believe in Me - even when you do not understand.

Conclusion:

In John Bunyon’s book *Pilgrim’s Progress* – the main Character, Christian, carries a heavy burden – and though he try and try to lay it down – it is without success: “I seek for, even to be rid of this heavy burden; but get it off my self I cannot: nor is there a man in our Country that can take it off my shoulders; therefore am I going this way, as I told you, that I may be rid of my burden . . .”

It was not until he came to the cross that he was able to lay the burden down: . . . just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his Shoulders, and fell from off his back.”

That is the image that should linger with us – Take your Trouble to the Lord – Trust Him against. What does trust look like? It looks like a heavy burden sliding off your back as you give it to the God love you – the God who cares for you.