

"REALISTIC REAL FAITH" SE1917

Date: 2020-11-01AM Context: Lockdown and Sunday Morning - AM GRA PM

Series: Resilience in Ruth Title: Realistic Real Faith

Readings: Rut1:1-5; Rut2:19-20 Cited: Rut1:20-21

1. INTRO TO READINGS

As part of our "Overcomers" series we looked at the story of Ruth last week. People so enjoyed looking into Ruth, that I want to spend November looking into this book and the characters we meet...

I'm giving the series the title: "Resilience in Ruth"

Today we'll be looking at Elimelech and Naomi.

The names in the story are a very important part of the story:

- Elimelech - my God Reigns
- Naomi - Pleasant
- Mara - Bitter
- Mahlon - sickness/unfruitfulness
- Kilion - weakness
- Bethlehem - house of bread
- Orpa - stubborn, mountain goat
- Ruth - friend, refreshment
- Boaz - strength

Our first reading tells the initial story and sets the stage - albeit a gloomy one... Naomi, describes her situation as follows:

1:20 "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."

The second reading is when Naomi, accompanied by Ruth, goes back to Moab and Ruth gleanes in Boaz's field. When Naomi learns where Ruth "landed" up - she rejoices....

2. READINGS

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name 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. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. (Ruth 1:1-5)

Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law.

"He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers." (Ruth 2:19-20)

3. SERMON

3.1. Intro

What kind of faith did Elimelech and Naomi have?

On the one hand, they seem pretty defeated...

- They flee to a foreign land
- Their sons marry foreign daughters
- The men die
- And Naomi talks about her bitter life.

Some have even suggested that Elimelech and Ruth had made a bad decision and that Moab was a mistake that had to be corrected.

But there is a **realism** and **reality** to their faith...

Theirs is not the preppy triumphalistic faith that is loud when times are good and falls apart when times are tough.

Theirs is a faith that tackles adversity with realism, but also with trust.

3.2. Elimelech

Elimelech ("My God is King") names his sons "sickness" and "weakness".

I can only imagine that they both were very frail at birth - otherwise why would they be so named...?

So, could it be possible that the two boys were "fragile" and so when a famine comes along, Elimelech moves his family to Moab, where there's food... (in spite of the fact that Israelites and Moabites were enemies and that they were under God's curse...)

They stay ten years - enough time for frail boys to become marriagable teens...

And the boys marry Moabite girls - (This is a tricky issue)

- On the one hand we have the example of Abraham getting a wife for Isaac from his "own people".

- We have various prohibition against foreign wives, but always for their negative influence. (idols)

- On the other hand there are also examples like Rahab who became "proselytes".

I guess the question is: Did Mahlon and Killion marry into Moab or did Ruth and Orpah marry into Israel?

The evidence we have in the text is that it was the latter...

The two girls are more loyal to an Israelite widow than their own people...

There is no hint whatsoever that the girls had a negative impact on the family's faith.

So my point about Elimelech is that he was secure in God as his King

and that his understanding of God was not geographical (that God only lived in Israel, but wherever Elimelech would go...) but relational.

Also, it would seem that he lived a family life that established God as King in the lives of his wife, sons and daughters-in-law.... And finally, in the working out the Kinsman-Redeemer thing, Elimelech's name and faith is vindicated by the outcome - "Naomi has a (grand)son" Which really implies that Elimelech's family line is intact - and this is victory.

3.3. Naomi

When coming to Naomi... Although she calls herself "Mara" - I think it is crystal clear that we are talking about her circumstances and not her nature... Throughout the book she comes across as gracious, wise and loved. Instead of seeing her as faltering in her faith I see her as courageous enough to refute the prosperity gospel thinking that says that we have a right to material and circumstantial prosperity and she is courageous enough to admit and even declare that her life is hard. While she does say that the Lord afflicted her, she is quick to recognise God's hand...

The high-point is in ch.2 where Naomi - who believes that God allowed Elimelech and her sons to die, rejoices at something simple like Ruth landing up on the right field...

"RU 2:20 "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped

showing his kindness to the living and the dead."

It's a profound moment:

3.4. Conclusion

And so in conclusion I want to end with the idea that Elimelech and Naomi are realists but have real faith.

- They name their sons honestly
- They move to where there is food when they need to
- But God is still their king in Moab
- Their influence is significant
- They don't shy away from pain
- They tackle the pain that God allows in their lives practically
- But continue to see Him at work in the small mercies.