

Today's text comes from one of my favorite books of the Old Testament, and that is Ruth! Ruth is a short book. It's only four chapters long, but it conveys to us an inspiring story of faith and loyalty; of how God can turn a tragedy into triumph. Then it's capped off with an amazing and very significant revelation at the end.

When you make the time to sit down to read this little book you will find it only takes about ten to fifteen minutes. So, I challenge **you** this week to read this important book from God's Word, and yes, Ruth is a **very** important book, **without** it we would all be ... Ruth-less.

At any rate, today's Old Testament text is the very beginning of this beautiful story of faithfulness. And these opening verses serve the important purpose of focusing our attention on the incredible devotion that this young woman has for her mother-in-law, Naomi. It's a devotion that's captured in Ruth's unwavering promise of faithfulness: "Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried" (vv. 16-17).

Before we get to those heart-warming words of devotion, though, we first must make our way through several verses from God's Word that paint a picture of total devastation. About 1200 years before Jesus was born a poor family from Bethlehem in Judea have to leave town and leave their country so they can find food. A man, his wife, and their two sons go to Moab, a prospering but pagan nation. Then tragically the father dies. Then even more tragically, his two sons die, leaving three widows in poverty with no means of support.

Naomi, the mother-in-law, sees only one option: She will go back to her hometown of Bethlehem. There she will find a way to live, alone... and **bitter**. In fact, that's exactly how she describes herself. Right after our text she says, "Call me Mara [which means bitter], because the Almighty has made my life very bitter" (Ruth 1:20-21). In the same way, Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law to go back to their own families. Maybe they could remarry and make a new life for themselves, maybe even a very **good** life. In any case, from Naomi's point of view, **their** future looks

brighter in Moab. One of the young widows, Orpah, decides to go home. Ruth does not.

After 16 verses of silence, Ruth finally speaks for the first time in this book that bears her name. And what she says is a surprise. She certainly doesn't talk like someone who's desolate and devastated. Instead, she is bound and determined to go with Naomi. And so, Ruth of the land of Moab comes to Bethlehem in Judah.

A modern storyteller would almost certainly give us some reasons for Ruth's surprising announcement. In other words they would likely expand upon and embellish the details that God provided us here in His Word. The speculation might include the following: Had Ruth's earlier life in Moab been unhappy? Had she found a warm relationship with her mother-in-law? Despite the fact that Naomi believed God had made her life very bitter (1:20–21), did Ruth detect in Naomi a faith that **trusted** God's future plans? Our text gives us no answers to these questions.

But what we **do** have from God's actual and inspired Word is all we need! Ruth's declaration of loyalty in verses 16 and 17 reveals a **deep and abiding** commitment. She covers Geography: Ruth says, "Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge." Next, she covers Sociology, "Your people shall be my people." Most importantly Ruth covers Theology, "Your God will be my God." And finally, to top it all of, she covers Chronology: "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried." Yes, Ruth commits herself to Naomi's **future**, her **people, her land**, her **God**, and her place of death and burial. These are no frivolous words! Ruth is committing herself to a future in the hands of Naomi and Naomi's God, sight unseen. **That's** trust!

From the rest of the book of Ruth, we know the plan the Lord had for Ruth. God prepared the way and the people and the events so Ruth could find a faithful and honorable husband- Boaz; so Naomi could declare, "The Lord has not stopped showing his kindness" (2:20); and so the women of Bethlehem could say to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman [and a] redeemer" (4:14).

Ruth's story has **more** than a happy ending in Bethlehem 12 centuries before the birth of Jesus. In the last chapter of the book, we

learn how Ruth was the mother of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:18–22). And we know even more! David was the great king of Israel, and from his descendants came **Jesus**, the Savior, the Son of God, who was born in Bethlehem because He was of the house and lineage of David . . . and of Ruth (Mt 1:5). Ruth is one of four women listed among the ancestors of Jesus. She is a testimony to the grace of God, who selects people others might overlook, despise, or reject. In this case a non-Israelite widow.

The Lord has prepared a plan for **us**, too. From Ruth, to David, to Mary and Joseph, to Jesus, to you and me, the Lord has prepared a way, extending His hand and His Word, including **us** in His story of salvation, connecting us to Himself and to one another through His Son. The Savior, born in Ruth's adopted town of Bethlehem, was named Jesus for He saves His people from their sins.

We don't know where our Savior will lead **us** in life. What will the Lord have **you** do? To whom will He have you talk? Where will He ask you to go? What hardships will you endure? How will God shape you and mold you into a stronger person of faith through those times of trial? What will you **give up** for His sake? What will you **receive** from Him during your time on earth? We just don't know. Not yet. But we do know **Him**. As I like to say, "We don't know what the future holds, but we do know the One Who holds the future."

Christ is with us all the way. Jesus said to His disciples—and to us—"I am with you always." To rearticulate Ruth's words, 'where you go, **He** goes; where you stay, **He** stays; your people are **His** people; the God you call Father is **His** Father; the Son of God is **your** Brother.

And this is how much He loves you: Our sin became **His** sin; our death, He died; our grave, He occupied; so that His righteousness is ours; His **life** is ours; His resurrection is our promised future; and His glory is ours to share—forever!

Our call to follow Jesus is not a detailed contract with clauses, descriptions, or details. It's not a matter of, "If you follow me, this is what I will ask you to do, and this is what I will give you in return . . ." Instead, the Lord places in front of us a paper, completely blank except for one

word: grace (*chesed*, v 8). In Baptism, He writes our name on the paper. His promise is simply that He will remain beside us and fill in the details day by day, as each day comes, all according to that one word: **grace**. What will the Lord ask of you? I don't know. But **pray**. Ask Him what He would have of you, on, each and every day as it comes.

That kind of arrangement takes **a great deal** of trust, but the Lord has shown Himself to be completely trustworthy and full of kindness, just as He was toward Ruth. He has guaranteed His commitment to us not with pen and ink, not with text messages and snapchat photos, but with water and His Word, and with the body and blood of His Son, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

So let's go! We're on a **journey** to Bethlehem, to Calvary, and to life everlasting in heaven. Where we go, He will go with us; where He goes, we will go—all by His grace. Amen!