

Ruth 1:1-5

The Danger of Departing

The book of Ruth is all about God's redemption. He can redeem a foreign widow from her destitution. He can redeem a bitter woman from her sorrow. He can redeem the sinful choices of a fearful man so that "all things work together for good." But God's grace and His power to redeem should never be used as an excuse to depart from the will of God. We must trust God through the hardest times and obey His word, even when another way seems better to us.

I. The _____ (Ruth 1:1)

- For the Old Testament Jews, the weather was very important, not only for the success of their farming, but also because it was an indicator of their _____ condition. (Deuteronomy 11:13-17)
- Elimelech's first mistake was thinking that their only problem was a only _____ problem.
- Before they entered into the promised land, God gave the Israelites clear instructions to _____ there once they had taken possession of it. (Deuteronomy 12:10)
- Instead of _____ on God by believing and obeying the truth of God's word, Elimelech did "that which was right in his own eyes."

II. The _____ (Ruth 1:2)

- They _____ God's people and the place God had told them to stay to go live with a people who did not worship God and who were the enemies of God's people. (Numbers 31:16; Deuteronomy 23:3; Judges 10:6)
- Elimelech may have justified his choice by saying that he was saving his family from the danger of physical starvation, but in reality, he was _____ them to an even greater danger. (Colossians 2:8)
- Elimelech made a bad decision, but his decision did not affect him only. His _____ had to bear the consequences of his sinful choice.

III. The _____ (Ruth 1:3-5)

- If we depart from God's word and God's will for us, we will _____ leaving. (Galatians. 6:8)
- Elimelech died in a place _____ of God's will. (Proverbs 14:12; James 1:14-15)
- Mahlon and Chilion were _____ by the Moabites. (Deuteronomy 28:15-16, 32)
- Naomi was left _____ and without any sons. She was left with no one to take care of her. (1 Timothy 5:8)
- Elimelech's story is a vivid reminder that trusting _____ always has bad consequences. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Conclusion

God is able to redeem us from the worst, but that is never an excuse for sin. It is better to make right choices and enjoy God's blessing than to make sinful choices and endure the painful consequences. We must not be _____ by our own reason and feelings. We must follow God's instructions and directions.

Ruth 1:1-5

The Danger of Departing

The events recorded in the book of Ruth occurred during the time of the Judges. During that 400 years, the Israelites repeatedly turned from God to worship idols and experienced God's punishment for their sin. After a time they would repent and God would raise up a deliverer, a judge to free them from oppression and rule over them. Before long the nation would turn back to idols, and the cycle would repeat. The culture of that time was described this way: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6)

At some point during the second half of that era, a man named Elimilech who lived in Bethlehem made the decision to leave his home in the promised land and God's people to live in Moab. He apparently thought that it was the right thing to do given the circumstances he was facing. But the results of that one decision were disastrous. He did "That which was right in his own eyes," but as Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

The book of Ruth is all about God's redemption. He can redeem a foreign widow from her destitution. He can redeem a bitter woman from her sorrow. He can redeem the sinful choices of a fearful man so that "all things work together for good." But God's grace and His power to redeem should never be used as an excuse to depart from the will of God. We must trust God through the hardest times and obey His word, even when another way seems better to us.

I. The Circumstances

Ruth 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Before we are introduced to the main character of the book of Ruth, we meet a Jewish man with a wife and two sons who were faced with a difficult circumstance. They lived at a time when Israel was floundering spiritually and the land was in the middle of a famine. As an agrarian society, they were largely dependent on the weather from month to month and year to year. If the weather was good with sufficient rain at the right times, then there was plenty to eat. If there was drought or damaging storms, there would be a shortage.

For the Old Testament Jews, the weather was very important, not only for the success of their farming, but also because it was an indicator of their spiritual condition. God had promised them that if they followed Him, He would send rain at the right times and they would be blessed with plenty to eat. God also warned them that if they disobeyed, then the rain would be withheld and there would be famine.

Deuteronomy 11:13-17 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, (14) That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. (15) And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. (16) Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; (17) And then the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

This was a physical famine that resulted from a spiritual problem. Not every trial we face will be a direct consequence of a specific sin we commit, but this one was. Israel was not right with God, as was often the case through the book of Judges, and God was trying to get their attention and bring them to repentance through this famine.

Elimelech's first mistake was thinking that their only problem was a only physical problem. It was not. The bigger problem was a spiritual problem, the problem of turning away from God. Because he viewed it as a physical problem only and sought to solve it through physical means (a change in location) he made the problem worse.

Bethlehem was the place that God had promised to bless Elimelech and his family, if he loved God and served him. It is noteworthy that Bethlehem literally means "house of bread." It was a reminder that God provides the needs of those who follow Him. If he had stayed in Israel, God would have taken care of him. We know that to be true because, ten years later when Naomi would return, there are people still living in Bethlehem that knew her and her husband before they left. They survived, and Elimelech could have too.

Furthermore, God had commanded him to stay in the land. Before they entered into the promised land, God gave the Israelites clear instructions to remain there once they had taken possession of it.

Deuteronomy 12:10 But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety;

Elimelech looked at his problem from the human perspective instead of looking to God for direction. He imagined he could solve the problem and he imagined life would be better in Moab. He may have analyzed and calculated, but he had to make an assumption and an assumption is nothing more than an educated imagination. Instead of relying on God by believing and obeying the truth of God's word, Elimelech did "that which was right in his own eyes."

II. The Choice

Ruth 1:2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

With the famine growing worse and the threat of starvation looming, Elimelech packed up his belongings, gathered his wife and two sons, and moved to Moab. They left God's people and the place God had told them to stay to go live with a people who did not worship God and who were the enemies of God's people.

Moab was not friendly to Israel and they did not worship the true God. We can trace the strife between Moab and Israel back to Number 17 and the story of Balak, king of Moab. He was the one who hired Balaam to curse Israel, only God would not let Balaam curse them. This was the Balaam whose donkey was smarter than he was. (2 Peter 2:16) It was Balaam who taught Balak how to cause the Israelites to bring God's curse upon themselves by committing immorality and worshipping idols.

Numbers 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

God cursed the Moabites for their wickedness and commanded that the Israelites separate from them.

Deuteronomy 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:

During the days of the judges, the Moabites were still a wicked people. They worshipped idols instead of the true God.

Judges 10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him.

All of this should have been known to Elimelech, yet he chose to depart from Bethlehem and dwell in Moab. He may have justified his choice by saying that he was saving his family from the danger of physical starvation, but in reality, he was exposing them to an even greater danger. He was exposing them to spiritual poisoning through the evil influence of a godless culture. His decision highlights the need for us to carefully guard against the evil influences of the world around us.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Elimelech made a bad decision, but his decision did not affect him only. His whole family had to bear the consequences of his sinful choice.

III. The Consequences

Ruth 1:3-5 And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. [4] And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. [5] And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

The first thing we note about Elimelech's story is the digression that resulted from his choice. His decision to depart had a snowball affect. Verse one tells us that Elimelech intended to just "sojourn" in Moab. He did not mean to stay a very long time. He did not want to become a citizen or even a resident. It was supposed to be a short term solution. However, in Ruth 1:2 we read that they came and "continue" in Moab. They stayed much longer than expected. Then in Ruth 1:4 we read that Naomi and her sons ended up dwelling in the land of Moab for ten years.

When they set out for Moab, Elimelech did not think that they would spend a decade there, but that is what happened. Because of his sinful choice, Elimelech and his family faced consequences far greater than he imagined they would. You can choose to sin, but you do not get to choose the consequences. Someone has once said that sin will always take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and make you pay more than you want to pay. When we choose to sin, we set in motion a process that we cannot stop.

Galatians 6:8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

When we sow, we always reap, and we always reap more than we sow. The consequences of getting out of God's will are often far greater than we anticipate. The devil would have us believe that it is better for us to do what we think is best rather than be restricted by God's instructions. If we depart from God's word and God's will for us, we will regret leaving. Obedience is the place of blessing.

The first obvious consequence of Elimelech's decision was that he died in a place outside of God's will. Death is not always a direct result of God's judgment on a particular sin. But for Elimelech, it was not God's will for him to die the land of Moab. He was away from his home, away from his family, away from his friends, and away from God, and that is a horrible place to end your life. He thought his way was right, but the end that way was death.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

James 1:14-15 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. (15) Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

The next consequence of Elimelech's decision was that Mahlon and Chilion were influenced by the Moabites. We know this because they married Moabite women contrary to God's law.

Deuteronomy 28:15-16, 32 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: [16] Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. [32] Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thine hand.

For Mahlon and Chilion to marry heathen women was wrong. God used these events in Ruth's life to bless her and bring her salvation, but that does not justify their wrong actions. God's grace must never be an excuse for our sin. (Romans 6:1) One of the most compelling reasons that we have to stay in the will of God is the influence that it will have on others if we get out of God's will, particularly our children. Whether you realize it or not, there are people watching you and following your lead to some degree. When you chose to get out of God's will, it will affect others.

Thirdly, as a consequence of Elimelech's choice, his sons Mahlon and Chilion died outside of God's will. We cannot say definitively that God killed them for their actions, but we can say that the place they died was outside of God's will. They were in the Land of Moab and they were married to heathen women.

The final consequence of Elimelech's decision was that his wife, Naomi, was left widowed and without any sons. She was left with no one to take care of her. Elimelech left the will of God to try and provide for physical needs for his family, only to have the physical and spiritual needs go unmet. What happened to him and his family in Moab was even worse than what he feared would happen to them in Bethlehem. He thought he was protecting his family, but he ended up endangering them. We are left with nothing positive to say about Elimelech because he did not take proper care of his wife and children.

1 Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Elimelech's story is a vivid reminder that trusting yourself always has bad consequences. A certain course of action may seem like the best idea to you, but if it is not God's way then it is the wrong way and it will end in disappointment and disaster.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Elimelech made a poor decision to leave the Promised Land to go into the land of Moab. While he made his decision for a good reason, the desire to provide for his family, it was made based solely upon human thinking and fleshly wisdom. He did not consider the spiritual repercussions that it would have on his family. Trusting yourself always had bad consequences. Elimelech and his son's died in the land of Moab and his wife and daughters-in-law were left with no one to take care of them.

Conclusion

These events set the stage for the story of Ruth. God will take this terrible situation and turn it around for good in the life of Naomi and Ruth. God is able to redeem us from the worst, but that is never an excuse for sin. It is better to make right choices and enjoy God's blessing than to make sinful choices and endure the painful consequences. We must not be guided by our own reason and feelings. We must follow God's instructions and directions.