



“GOD’S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS”

WEEK ONE -THE OUTWARD JOURNEY

Some time back, I was asked to do a short talk on the book of Ruth. As I read through it several times, it occurred to me that it reflected three themes that are very relevant to our times. The story is about: ECONOMIC MIGRANTS, MOTHERS-IN-LAW, and FAMILY TREES (in the Bible called GENEALOGIES). It is also about the importance of family, loyalty, and humility.

Read Chapter 1:1-18

In the opening verse it tells us these events happened “*when the judges ruled*”, which places it around 1150 to 1025 BCE. Prior to this time, it tells us in the book of Judges, that everyone “*did what was right in their own eyes*”. It was a period of religious and moral degeneracy, national disunity, and frequent foreign oppression. By contrast the book of Ruth reflects a time of peace between Israel and Moab (NLT)

- Do we do what **WE** think is right? What is the yardstick by which we measure our actions?

The land of Israel was experiencing extreme famine and so Elimelech, his wife Naomi and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion who lived in Bethlehem, felt compelled to move to Moab, which had not experienced drought, to survive. It was a strange choice as the Israelites hated the Moabites. In the book of Numbers, God condemns the Moabites for their worship of false gods and sexual immorality. Nevertheless, this did not deter them and so became economic migrants. The family not only settled there but, following the death of Elimelech, the two sons each married Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth.

- Could this be a reminder to us about welcoming migrants into our country?
- Are we selective about the migrants we are prepared to accommodate?

- Does it seem strange that despite the history, this family seemed happy to assimilate into the Moabite people?

After living there for ten years, both Naomi's sons also died. This would have put her in difficulties, both social and material. She had no one to provide for her and she was living in a foreign land. Naomi had a decision to make and having heard that God had blessed his people in Judah, providing them again with good crops, she decided to return to her home country. It's strange because just before starting to write this, I had a workman to the house who was Polish but has lived here over twenty years. He had just returned from a trip to Poland and said although he had a good life here, his heart was still in Poland and at some point, must return there.

Read again verses 7-15

It is clear from verses 8-10 that there was a close bond between the three women to the extent that the two daughters-in-law said they wanted to go with Naomi to her people.

- Why do you think Naomi didn't want them to return with her?
- From verse 13 we learn that Naomi is bitter because of all that has happened. Do we feel bitter about things in our lives?
- If so, how do we deal with it?

Having set out on the journey back to Judah, Naomi again challenges her daughters-in-law. Orpah decided to stay in her own land, but Ruth had determined to remain with Naomi.

Verses 16-19

"But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more."

- Whereas Orpah was easily persuaded, not so Ruth. Can you think of any reasons for this difference?
- These are very well-known verses but also very powerful.
- Do we have this sort of determination in following Jesus?
- What characteristics does Ruth show by this statement?

- It reminds me of the gospel song we often quote: *The world behind me, the cross before me, ... No turning back, no turning back.*
- Can you think of other biblical characters who have shown this determination?
- What can we do to develop this sort of determination in our Christian walk?

Read verses 19-22

- What strikes you about Naomi's attitude on her return to Bethlehem?
- Do we quickly blame God when things go wrong?
- What are the best ways of developing a positive Christian attitude even when things are not going as we would like?

This book of Ruth is one of only two in scripture concentrating on the life of women, Esther being the other. That alone makes it quite remarkable. However, as we move through the book, we will learn of God's wonderful provision for his people and for us today.



Prayer:

Thank you, God, that there is no shadow of turning with you. You are always faithful!

Amen