

Pastor David's notes for 9/4-5/2010

Redemption and Return

Life in Crisis / Ruth 1:1-22

"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

"When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."

Leviticus 19:33-34

"But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless."

Psalms 10:14

"For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men." Lamentations 3:33

Page 2

"Life in Crisis / Ruth 1:1-22"

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth, Naomi's life and hope is devastated by:

1. loss of resource and security
2. loss of marriage and family
3. loss of identity and community

In the midst of difficulties and crisis, decisions have to be made about what we believe:

1. about God
2. about having a "full" life
3. about the present season

next weekend: "Surviving Forward" - Ruth 2:1-21



CONNECTION QUESTIONS

for personal study & individual reflection,
and small group discussion & comment

“Life in Crisis”: Ruth 1:1-22

1. The book of Ruth is intriguing in that it tells a story of loss and redemption about ordinary people in a difficult time. No great battles are fought, no national or international issues are decided. This is the story of one family in crisis told from a woman’s perspective about surviving loss and limitation with little resource and struggling faith. It is a story of being away from where you were meant to be and getting back home. Like Naomi and Ruth, we live in a time that requires courage and risk in pursuing the life God has for us. In what ways can you personally relate to the story Ruth 1:1-22 introduces? In what ways does it seem foreign and far-removed?

2. Elimelech, Naomi and their sons left their home in Bethlehem as economic refugees seeking rescue and resource in the neighboring country of Moab. We are not given much information about how they were received in that foreign land, but we do know how the Lord expected aliens and strangers to be treated in Israel. Read Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:12-19; and Malachai 3:5. What do these passages tell us about God’s expectation for His people regarding their response to aliens and refugees? Why are we supposed to have a particular empathy and identification for those who live as aliens in a foreign land? What do Ephesians 2:17-19 and 1 Peter 2:11 tell us about our very real connection to the experience of being strangers and aliens ourselves?

3. Women in the ancient world were in a very vulnerable position when left on their own. Without marriage or family protection and support, women had few options when it came to providing for themselves. They were shut out of trades and education. They were the prey of the powerful and the perverse. Servitude, slavery or prostitution often became the only options for unprotected widows in the harsh, survival-based culture of the ancient world. This is one reason why the support of widows without families was such a compassionate concern of Jesus and the early church. Naomi, Orpah and Ruth were in the most vulnerable position possible, which is why Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to their “mother’s home” (Ruth 1:8). In light of these realities, how do you understand Orpah’s decision to go back? What do you make of Ruth’s choice to stay with Naomi and go forward with her in this vulnerable place?

4. How does Naomi understand God’s role in her misfortune and suffering? Why does she believe that the Lord is against her? Can you understand her thinking? Do you think she was right or wrong?

5. Chapter one of Ruth ends with Naomi and Ruth’s return to Bethlehem. The women of the town find Naomi quite changed by her experiences, and Naomi herself wants to be called “Mara” which means “bitter”. Who we are and who we become in the midst of affliction is one of life’s greatest challenges. In too much loss, we can lose ourselves. In their return to Bethlehem, “the house of bread”, these two women need to find hope, need to find God, and they need to find themselves. Do you know people in a comparable life season? In your own uncertainty about the future, is there opportunity for new choices and redemptive change?
