

RUNNING TOWARD GOD

The Book of Ruth is about the way the universe is and a certain kind of mind that has to live within it.

You'll notice that the book begins with Elimelech taking Naomi and their two sons to live in the country of Moab because of a famine in Bethlehem in Judah.

This was a really difficult time for the children of Israel.

It's the time between the death of Joshua and the anointing of their first king in 1 Samuel.

It's the time of leaders like Deborah, Gideon and Sampson.

For those of us who aren't familiar with what life was like during this period of time in Israel's history, suffice it to say that this was not their best years.

It was a time when the judges ruled.

The very last verse of the Book of Judges says,

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.
(Judges 21:25)

Morally, spiritually and religiously this was one of the lowest points in Israel's history.

The writer of Judges describes this period of history in order to help us understand what it was really like in Judah at this time.

In 2:16-19 the writer of Judges says,

16 Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. 18 Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. (Judges 2:16-19)

It is obvious. Morally, spiritually and religiously, Israel was bankrupt.

They had forgotten that their well being depended on if they obeyed the Law of Moses or not.

Remember that chapters 27-28 of the Book of Deuteronomy told Israel that if they kept the covenant, they would be blessed.

But if they broke the covenant, the land and the people would be cursed.

God's predictions about Israel had come true.

He told them that after they entered in the land of Canaan they would forget Him and his covenant and the diseases He brought in Egypt would come upon them. And so it is no surprise that there is a famine in the land.

Bethlehem, meaning “house of bread,” is now empty.

The people are starving!

And very few, if any,
were saying,
that it was
because of their own negligence.

They were so far away from God
that they didn't even think
that God was connected to the famine.

One other important fact: They went to Moab.

Moab was a country that originated
when Lot had an incestuous relationship
with both of his daughters.

One of those daughters had a son
by the name of Moab,
who then became the father of the Moabites.

This was a nation that was born out of incest.

- It was Moab that caused Israel to sin.
- It was Moab that oppressed Israel
for 18 years under the leadership
of King Eglon.
- And it was because of Moab's idol worship,
and its opposition to Israel,
that caused God to curse Moab.

Moab was a cursed nation,
and it was no place for a child of God.

Yet, Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons were in Moab.

Let's not judge them too quickly for leaving Bethlehem,
even though it was a mistake,
since we often find ourselves doing the exact same thing.

You know what I mean...don't you.

You're in the church but you're unhappy.

You slowly forget
that your life
depends upon
your keeping of your covenant that
you made with God through Christ.

You forget that happiness comes from self-sacrifice and service.

So you leave Bethlehem and go to Moab in search of food.

You leave the church and go to the world in search of fulfillment.

You're in Moab
because you now believe
that happiness and encouragement
come when others cater to your preferences and needs.

It reminds us of the Israelites,
who during the Exodus,
willfully put God to the test
by demanding the food they craved (Psalm 78:18).

You see, while you're in Moab
you simply do not consider
that your well being
is attached to the covenant.

Your health,
finances,
job performance,
marriage,
childrearing
all depend upon your relationship to the covenant.

Ignorance of God's Word is a most destructive thing.

The LORD says through Jeremiah
concerning the leaders of his day,

⁸ *The priests did not ask,
'Where is the LORD ?'
Those who deal with the law did not know me;
the leaders rebelled against me.
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
following worthless idols. (Jer 2:8)*

The very people
who were supposed to see God in everything,
completely lost touch with Him.

Anytime we ignore God's instruction,
we will not be blessed.
Look at what happened to Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion.

They died and their wives were left all alone.

And a woman alone back then was not good.

Women had no legal rights.

They couldn't own anything or make any business deals.

Moreover, a woman without a man was susceptible to injury and rape.

The only hope that Naomi and Ruth had was to make an appeal to the LORD.

Naomi heard that God was blessing Judah with food... so the women set out to return to Bethlehem in Judah.

Orpah decided to go back to her people and her gods (Ruth 1:15).

But Ruth says to Naomi in 1:16,

¹⁶ Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. (Ruth 1:16)

The first thing I learn from Ruth is that if we make an appeal to the LORD, things change.

From this point on in the story things do change for Naomi and Ruth.

They changed because Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem in Judah.

- Your life can be blessed today if you return to the house of bread.

- Your heart can be filled today if you return to the house of God.
- You can be made whole today if you run toward God.

God shows us right here a great truth:

If we make and appeal to the LORD, things will change.

As soon as Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem they were starving.

So Ruth asked Naomi
for permission
to go glean grain in the fields.

Notice the providence of God...

³ *So [Ruth] went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. (Ruth 2:3)*

Yeh, right As it turned out.

Does anyone believe this was an accident?

Absolutely not!

God was blessing Ruth
because she was in Bethlehem
seeking God's face.

The LORD rewards God-seekers!

...those who put themselves in a position
to make an appeal to the LORD

- by doing no wrong
- and by focusing on God's Word.

So if you're in Moab today, with your stomach growling,
the only way to be filled is to seek God's face.

Maybe you're like the prodigal son...

You've gone off
in search of fulfillment in the world
and you're starving to death.

Come back to God! Run toward God?

God is waiting for you to come back.
He's filled with compassion.

Like the prodigal son, you have to say,

²¹ *'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* (Matt 15:21)

If you repent,
God will forgive you
and offer you the bread of heaven.
The second thing I learn from Ruth
is that a believer is strong enough
to hold uncomfortable
and often painful tensions in the mind
without terminal discouragement or fatal weakness.

In other words, seeing your predicament doesn't destroy you.

It's not the tensions in your mind that destroy you
but your unwillingness to believe
what God says about your tensions.

Again, the fact that Ruth is a woman and starving
isn't the main issue or problem.

The main issue is her relationship to the covenant.

Remember what God had told the Israelites

¹ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: (Deut 28:1)

Jesus has told us the same thing.

He said,

³¹ Don't worry about what you'll eat or drink or wear. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:31, 33)

This is where Ruth speaks so powerfully to me.

Let me show you what I mean.
In 2:11-12, Boaz replies to Ruth,

¹¹ "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be

richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (Ruth 2:12)

To a mind like Ruth
the most practical step of all
is to relegate whatever she is
feeling,
experiencing
and thinking
about her situation to God and his truth.

This is what
under whose wings you have come to take refuge
means.

Ruth shows us
what it takes
to do what she did.

To practice biblical reasoning
means you have to look at the Self.

- You look at the Self in the light of the Word of God.
- You never look at the Word of God in the light of the Self.

You have to confront the habitual inclination
to hear God’s Word in light of the Self.
You have to resist a cultural reading of God’s Word.
That’s why, by the way,
to many the Bible is a myth
and to Marx and Engles
it was the opiate of the masses.

But the biblical mind resists the temptation

to reflect on God through the lens of the Self;
rather the self becomes the focus of the Word of God.

Ruth offers us a way of thinking about material situations.

It is predicated upon
what God has to say about
the power of God.

In Matt 22:29, Jesus says,

²⁹ “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. (Matt 22:29)

The power of God was underestimated.

Elimelech underestimated the power of God.

Naomi and Ruth’s return to Bethlehem
shows us that
they didn’t give up on the power of God.

Elimelech concerned himself
only with what he could see.

If you do this it is “in error,” as Jesus says,
and therefore wrong.

Ruth shows us
that to do things God’s way,
is to experience God.

Because Naomi and Ruth trusted God,
God took care of them both.

Boaz married Ruth.

Ruth had a child named Obed.

Obed had a son named Jesse.

Jesse had a son named David.

God took a gentile woman, living in Moab, a place cursed by God,
and wove her into his divine, eternal plan to redeem humanity.

If God can use her, he can use you!

He can take you out of the world, save you,
and weave you into his divine, eternal plan.

And you can live with Him forever.

Will you come to Bethlehem?

Will you come and feast on the bread of heaven?

Jesus is waiting for you today.

Will you come now and find rest for your soul?

Will you run toward God?

