

Naomi

A Journey through Death, Burial And Resurrection

Think for a moment about how amazing it is that Ruth, a Moabitess woman, was not only one of just two women to have a book of the bible named after her but that she was also one of only four women who are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Christ. Part of what makes this remarkable is not only her presence in this genealogy but her specific order in this genealogy. "And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; (Matthew 1:5-6)" She was the great-grandmother of King David which also means she was a direct descendant of Christ. In other words, Christ came forth through her. What makes this particularly interesting is what the Law of Moses said of Moabites. "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." (Deuteronomy 23:3) How could it be that David the great grandson of this Moabitess woman and the great great grandson of a harlot inhabitant of the land of Canaan, not only became the King of Israel but that He also worshipped before the Ark of the Lord in the tabernacle of David. This seems contrary to the Law of Moses. He not only entered into the congregation of the Lord, He worshipped before the ark itself. This was highly unorthodox; only the High Priest of God was supposed to come before the ark. So how could it be that David was the apple of God's eye? If he did these things that seemed so contrary to the law, how could he also say that he loved God's law? Could it be that God's intent is not just that everyone live according to the law? Of course, we as Christians say that we believe that our salvation is by faith, but is that how we live? Do we truly comprehend God's grace and what it means not to seek to live by the law? It can be seen so clearly in this book. Ruth was a Moabitess and probably grew up worshipping false gods but her identity and genealogy were changed. She became a part of Israel by faith. The book of Romans says of Abraham:

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." (Romans 4:11-12)

Ruth was a Moabitess by her natural birth but became an Israelite by faith. This was also true of Rahab the mother of the man who would become Ruth's husband. Two consecutive generations that were not of the natural blood of Abraham. What a testament to the truth of the gospel. Rahab the harlot and Ruth the Moabitess included into the line

of Christ. These women were not only included in Israel, but were in the direct line of the Messiah. We look at our own natural lives and wonder, "How could Christ come out of me?" We look with our natural eyes and ask, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" The answer to these questions is found IN CHRIST. Apart From Him, we have no hope of anything good coming out of us, but in Him we are crucified and buried and He and He alone is resurrected so that we can now say that it is not I but Christ.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6

It is important that we realize that what has happened to us is more than just accepting a new set of values or doctrines. We are no longer of the same genealogy of Adam into which we were born. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Colossians 1:13.) "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13) Like Rahab and Ruth, we have become a part of a genealogy that brings forth Christ. However, Ruth's presence in the genealogy of Christ is not the only amazing thing here but also how she got there.

First, we will look at Elimelech Naomi's husband. (Ruth 1:2) Here is a man who lived in Bethlehem "the house of bread" with his family. He was abiding in the Promised Land, but he chose to leave that place to find food elsewhere. How could he leave the house of bread to find bread? Well, a few things tell us how this happened. First, the bible says that this account happened under the government of the judges.

Under the government of the judges, Israel had already entered the land. They were clearly over the Jordan in and the land that God had promised them. However, the Israelites did not fully obey the Lord. This can be seen if you read the first two chapters of Judges. This is the same way that we serve God by our flesh. Our intentions are to obey the Lord fully, but when we find ourselves in circumstances that seem to contradict what God spoke to us, we stop. We begin to justify why we cannot go the way God showed us to go. We say that this enemy has iron chariots that we cannot defeat. We give up on God's way and use other means to achieve what we believe God wants or simply to get what we want. We fail to see that God has already provided the means to carry out what He has asked of us. We fail to see that God has put us in a land flowing with milk and honey because it does not look that way to our carnal minds. Ultimately, the way we choose to go leads us into a prison of circumstances from which there appears to be no escape.

A key verse that describes this government of judges is found in the last chapter of this book. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Judges 21:25. Each man did what was right in His own eyes. This describes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We always try to pick the good fruit, not understanding that the problem is not the bad fruit on the tree we are eating from but that we are eating from the wrong tree altogether. Our best judgment will still miss God

because our carnal mind is at enmity with God, even when it does what it thinks is right. This is how Elimelech was able to justify leaving the house of bread, the land of promise to go to Moab. When we do not truly comprehend that have entered into God's Promised Land, it is easy for us to leave that place looking for the things we need elsewhere. We have joined ourselves to this earthly carnal view that flows out of our old Adamic nature. This nature may seek to serve God but it always falls short.

So Naomi was carried away by something over which she had no control. Paul said it like this, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Romans 7:19-20 So we are carried away, much like Naomi, only we are carried away by our own lustful passions, by the sin nature dwelling in us "Let no one say when passing through trial, 'My temptation is from God;' for God is incapable of being tempted to do evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But when a man is tempted, it is his own passions that carry him away and serve as a bait." Because of whom she had joined herself to, she was now in bondage, trapped in Moab. Her situation seemed hopeless; however, the husband who had led her into this place was now dead.

"So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Romans 7:3-4)

"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. 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. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 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." (Judges 1:1-4)

God had given the Israelites a place to dwell. He had given them the promised land of Canaan. That was where they were to dwell regardless of how things looked outwardly. God promised them that if they would follow Him and put Him first that it would be a land flowing with milk and honey. We have already said that the Israelites did not fully obey. However, the root of this disobedience was very simply their lack of faith. They were looking to their own abilities and resources as the means to drive out the inhabitants but God told them that He would drive out the inhabitants before them, Exodus 23:2. This was the root of their failure. They thought they were supposed to take this land for God when in fact God wanted to take the land for them, through them. This is very different from the way most Christians try to serve Christ. Many try by their own flesh to do what can only be done through Christ. The result is ultimately failure and self-justification.

We must take our eyes off ourselves and set them on God. This is not about some religious exercise but about the relationship that God desires to have with His people, but we so easily miss this. Instead of allowing God to work through us, we seek to work for God. The deceptive thing about this trap is that outwardly, at least at first, these two things may appear the same, but there is a huge difference. Not only is our flesh and our carnal mind not capable of following God, but the bible says it is at enmity with God. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Romans 8:7) Therefore, in truth, we like Elimelech will fail and in the end find ourselves working against God's purposes. We will look up and find ourselves in bondage and like Israel, in need of a deliverer. This government ruled in Israel when Elimelech took his family to Moab and this government ruled in him. He sought deliverance from his circumstances in the land of Moab.

As Christians, we can often be guilty of this same folly. We find ourselves in a difficult circumstance and we set our eyes on the outward situation rather than on the Lord. This is the beginning of our grief because from that place we begin to allow our carnal mind to justify our looking elsewhere for our deliverance. Even though the Word of God clearly tells us, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) Instead, we turn our eyes toward the wind and the waves as Peter did and find ourselves sinking down into our circumstances overwhelmed and in need of Christ to reach down and pull us up. Wouldn't it be better just to keep our eyes on Him and to continue to walk over those things that would pull us down?

We must realize our constant need for the Lord. This need is not just related to our circumstance and it is not just about getting our needs met. We need Jesus because we have been joined to Him. We need Him as a branch needs the vine. We need Him as a finger needs a hand. If we understand the relationship of oneness that Christ has brought us into, we will see how ridiculous it would be to try to leave that place. To walk separate is to walk lifelessly. Elimelech leaving the land to find bread was like a finger leaving the hand to find nourishment. Just as with Elimelech, there can be but one outcome when we leave that place. Death! Elimelech and both of his sons died in Moab. We are joined to Christ. He is our only life! We are now bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. However, death is not the end of this story.

God is so beautiful. His ways are so far above us. He has ordained that life comes out of death. So even as Elimelech was taking his family down into death, God was preparing a resurrection. Even out of this man's failure, God saw fit to bring forth life. You see God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. So here stands Naomi. Naomi who began with a husband and two sons was now alone.

It is Naomi that we will focus on now because it is not Elimelech's death or the death of his sons through which life came to Ruth, although God did use Elimelech's failure. It is always the death of Christ that brings forth life, but where can we find the death of Jesus in this Old Testament book? We can find this death in the person of Naomi.

The death that Naomi experienced was not her own death but the death of the Lord working in her. It was not primarily for her but for others. “So then death worketh in us, but life in you.” (2 Corinthians 4:12) The first recipient of this was Ruth. The death that Naomi experienced brought Ruth into resurrection. Where is all of this in the book of Ruth? Let’s look at the account.

“And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:5-17)

Before Naomi’s family came to Moab Ruth probably knew very little about the God of Israel. She may have heard stories but to her they were probably just stories. However, then suddenly here is a family from Israel living so close. How did Ruth come to know this family? How did she come to marry Naomi’s son and ultimately Boaz? What caused this woman to change so drastically that Boaz saw such beauty not in her outward form but in her nature?

“And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust”. (Ruth 3:11-12)

Naomi believed she had nothing to offer to anyone at that point in here life. As she returned to Israel, she declared that she had gone out full but had returned empty. This statement is true in one sense. Naomi had seen that she had nothing in herself but as was

pointed out earlier, we are not to live by our own resources. Naomi had come to a place of weakness, emptiness, and brokenness that allowed Christ to begin to shine forth. It was in this state that I believe that Ruth began to be effected by this life. Regardless of when it happened, there was a point that Ruth recognized that she had to have this life that she saw at work in Naomi. She began to recognize in Naomi a transforming power that caused this woman even in death somehow to manifest life. Many would never have noticed it, but a person like Ruth whose heart was at a place of desperate thirst for water in a dry and parched land saw it very clearly.

Ruth decided that she had to know the God that caused Naomi to be so different. This is made evident by Ruth's declaration that whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. Something caused this love and loyalty that Ruth had toward Naomi, something so powerful that it transformed Ruth from a Moabitess into a true Israelite.

So then, Ruth clung to Naomi but Orpah kissed her goodbye. Ruth grabbed hold of Naomi, this woman who felt so useless and empty, and she held on for dear life. She joined herself to and identified herself with the one who brought the only light that Ruth had ever seen in her darkness. Both of these women were daughters in law to Naomi but Orpah turned and went back to her old life. Who could blame Orpah? She did not do anything evil, she was just looking out for herself. There was nothing for her in this new land. Her identity lay in the land of her birth, in the land of Moab. It would be pure folly to follow after Naomi. There could be nothing in it for her, and after all, Naomi herself had urged her to go back. Naomi held no malice against Orpah for returning. She had wanted her to know that there was nothing for her to gain by continuing.

However, Ruth saw with different eyes. There was a desperation, a determination, a hunger at work in her heart that would not be satisfied by anything less than knowing this life that she had experienced through Naomi. She had begun to joining in spirit to Israel. She did not seek her own benefit or desires but put others before herself. She saw that it was not just about gaining for herself but put Naomi's welfare before her own. In doing this, Ruth began a process that would transform her into the bride of Boaz's heart. He would see the bride in her when no one else could. He would see Christ where no others in Israel would even dream to look for Him. He would see the nature and character of the Lord that he loved where others just saw a foreign woman, a Moabitess whose offspring would be unable to enter the temple of the Lord for ten generations – or would they?

So Naomi had heard that there was bread in Bethlehem and so she went back to the house of bread and in doing so brought this Moabitess woman, Ruth across the Jordan and into the land of God's promise. Crossing the Jordan river was a type of death for Israel and so in Ruth's crossing the Jordan, she too left behind her old identity and entered into a new life. Ruth the Moabitess was left behind and a new Ruth immersed on the other side. This woman was an Israelite, a daughter of Abraham, with a new family and genealogy. This new life was not the life of a Moabitess trying to fit in but the life of one who was truly

joined. She began through the instruction of Naomi to learn what it meant to live this new life. So this is how Ruth found herself gleaning in the field of Boaz.

Boaz's reaction to Ruth shows a depth of character in Him that was rare in Israel. He did not look upon Ruth with earthly eyes of flesh but saw her as the Lord saw her. He saw that she was no longer a Moabitess but that she had been grafted into Israel. Only by seeing Ruth in this way was Boaz able to act as a kinsman redeemer for Ruth. He did not see her as one who would somehow defile his family or Israel but as one who had been joined to Israel. He recognized the character, the nature that was in her as being the same character that was in him. He saw a woman that was already working in His field to feed his family, for Naomi was of his family. He saw one that had turned from everything that she once was, gave up everything that she might have, to care for and love one who had nothing to give her in return. He saw Jesus, the Lamb of God, the One that he loved with all of his heart manifest in this woman. He saw a treasure in this earthen vessel. This is how our groom sees us and it is how He desires that we would see one another.

Boaz bought the field not for the field but for the treasure that he saw buried in that field. The other kinsman redeemer that had an opportunity to purchase this field did not perceive the treasure that was buried there. All he saw was a Moabitess that would endanger his own little inheritance. He kept his own little inheritance but Boaz and Ruth were joined to One who had a greater inheritance. They became a part of a great cloud of witnesses that would bring forth Christ. They were added to His line!

Next, something extraordinary happens! Remember that Ruth was not joined to Israel without cost. There was a cost to not only Boaz but the greatest cost was Naomi's. She went down into death so that Ruth might receive life. She went out full and came back empty. She seemed to have everything in the beginning but now she had nothing. However, look at what the women said to Naomi:

“Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”(Ruth 4:14-17)

Therefore, God declared that this fruit, which had been born through Ruth, is Naomi's fruit. This child was born through the kinsman redeemer and thus bore the name of Naomi's son. So out of death came life. Somehow, without any effort of her own this fruit was reckoned by God as Naomi's. A son is born to Naomi. The Son is born through Naomi. Thus through Naomi's death, life comes to Ruth and to all of Israel as the genealogy of Christ continues. Naomi did not see this coming. However, God is so much greater than our weakness or lack. It was out of this weakness and lack that God brought forth this fruit, this fruit unto God. Even though the son came out of the loins of another it was another that was joined to the same Lord. Naomi and Ruth were one in the Lord so

when Ruth bore fruit so did Naomi bear fruit. Therefore, the underlying story here is of Naomi's journey from barrenness to fruitfulness but that journey did not end with a great individual victory through Naomi but through her seeing her oneness with Ruth, with Israel, and most of all with the Lord.