

A Sermon preached by Martin Tanner in St Mary's, Market Drayton on Thursday 15th September 2016 at 10.00am

SS2 RUTH:

One of the blessings God promised to his people was fruitfulness, many children and the height of blessing was to have "a quiver of seven sons"

Yet, in Chapter 1, Naomi finds herself in a foreign land, with a dead husband, two dead sons and not a single grandchild to keep the family name alive. She is bitter and her life has fallen apart.

On her return from Moab to Jerusalem Naomi, whose name means "pleasant" says to those who greet her, "***Do not call me Naomi but Mara*** (which means 'bitter') ***for I went away full but have returned empty.***"

SO, the question is: "Is God there when life falls apart?"

How can we say that God "watches over us" in such a situation?

Just as an aside, first, note that Naomi and her husband **did bring part of the problem upon themselves**. The famine in Judah did not last long verse 6 tells us, but they chose to leave their God-given land and trust in their own nose. Some of their pain they brought upon themselves.

That's an aside. What is much more important is their conduct in bad times.

FIRST, Naomi does NOT LOSE HER FAITH.

Yes, in verse 13 she complains and says, "*The Lord's hand has gone against me*" BUT she still calls God "El Shaddai" (See NIV footnote v20), she still calls him "Almighty God". A name that means God can turn things round. That blessing can come out of pain, good things come out of helplessness.

(2)

Naomi does not despair of God or reject God.

She does not lose her faith.

INDEED, her faith is infectious and her faith blesses Ruth.

For Ruth said, "*YOUR God will be MY God*".

How did this come about? -Only through the witness of Naomi.

It's a bit like when Cath Barnett left. She said to us on her last Thursday morning, "*Your faith has helped my faith.*"

Ruth must have seen something real in Naomi's faith. Naomi must have told her about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Ruth must have sensed that there was something different and more real about the God the people of Israel worshipped. Presumably, the idols of Moab did not satisfy her. **Naomi's witness must have opened Ruth's heart to God.**

Orpah, in contrast, was different. She DID go back to her old gods. Perhaps she was not prepared to change, perhaps she was *afraid* to change. Some people will NEVER change. Even when they have been shown a better way, they stay with what they know and resist the truth.

Not so, Ruth. She took a risk with God.

So, when your life falls apart DO NOT WALK AWAY FROM GOD.

Do not reject God.

Do not find substitutes for God: Work, Busyness, Hobbies.

INSTEAD:

-Be like Naomi. Keep your faith and be a good witness. A good witness is worth a 100 sermons!

-Be like Ruth and find a real faith.

SECOND, find someone else who is hurting, discouraged, or down AND BE A FRIEND TO THEM!

This is what Ruth did.

(3)

The world says, "look after yourself and you'll be all right" but the problem is that this way never leads to spiritual fulfilment.

Ruth shows us the better way. She doesn't just think of herself. **She is a shining example of "love your neighbour as yourself"** and shows how in looking after others first we can find fulfilment and peace.

Naomi has helped Ruth come to faith and now Ruth is faithful to her Mother-in-Law. She will not leave her alone and desolate. She makes the commitment that "*where you go, I will go.*" **Ruth knew that because Naomi had lost so much that she NEEDED A FRIEND, and a faithful, reliable, dependable and good friend at that.** Verse 14 expresses this when it says Ruth "clung" to Naomi.

The truth is this:

God uses people who don't get all wrapped up in themselves.

We help ourselves OUT of trouble
when we choose to help others IN trouble.

This is the way we are designed to live best:

- To minister to the needs of others
- To be unselfish
- To be those who give out

Its the way to fulfilment, peace and joy.

Ruth teaches us to "love our neighbour as ourself."

Should we choose the alternative and focus on ourselves and our troubles, then there is only one outcome: The Blues!

And as Ruth sticks by Naomi as a true friend, Naomi's life improves. She returns to Bethlehem and is recognised and welcomed home and accepted. She is no longer, to use her word, 'empty'. Hope begins to return.

(4)

THIRD, EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM GOD

Or, at least, expect more than you do at the moment!

An outsider was part of the lineage of Christ. Who would have expected that!

Ruth took a risk in following Naomi's faith and going to Naomi's land but both paid huge dividends for her.

May the story of Ruth raise your expectations of God and what God might do in your life.

SO, when 'life falls apart' remember the story of Ruth:

-Keep your faith in God and be a good witness

-Be a friend to others who are hurting

-And Expect great things from God

In your troubles, God IS there and God STILL cares.