

December 8th, 2019

Ruth 1: 8-22

Unlikely Women Who Bring Glory to God: Ruth

⁸ Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Go, turn back, each of you to the household of your mother. May the Lord deal faithfully with you, just as you have done with the dead and with me.

⁹ May the Lord provide for you so that you may find security, each woman in the household of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

¹⁰ But they replied to her, “No, instead we will return with you, to your people.”

¹¹ Naomi replied, “Turn back, my daughters. Why would you go with me? Will there again be sons in my womb, that they would be husbands for you? ¹² Turn back, my daughters. Go. I am too old for a husband. If I were to say that I have hope, even if I had a husband tonight, and even more, if I were to bear sons— ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters. This is more bitter for me than for you, since the Lord’s will has come out against me.”

¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth stayed with her. ¹⁵ Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do this to me and more so if even death separates me from you.” ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it.

¹⁹ So both of them went along until they arrived at Bethlehem. When they arrived at Bethlehem, the whole town was excited on account of them, and the women of the town asked, “Can this be Naomi?”

²⁰ She replied to them, “Don’t call me Naomi,^[a] but call me Mara,^[b] for the Almighty^[c] has made me very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the Lord has returned me empty. Why would you call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has deemed me guilty?”

²² Thus Naomi returned. And Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, returned with her from the territory of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

I want to tell you a story. My story starts of course when I got married to handsome man. He was a kind and a carrying man. His name was Elimelech. Soon we were blessed with two beautiful sons. Our oldest was Mahlon and youngest was Chilion. But the life was not easy in Judah. We had no food to eat. Severe famine spread through all the Canaan. We prayed and we talked and it was not easy to make a decision. But when you face a famine and you have two little children to feed, you choose to what will provide bread on the table. I do not want to leave the land of my own, I do not want to leave my people...But we have to make a decision. My husband decided we need to move to Moab. I know what Moab is. I now we will be foreigners. I know they are our enemies... I know our history. But do you think we want to go or we have no choice but to move there...

The trip was very hard, sand, mountains, heat... It took us 8 days to get to Moab. But we arrived and we started our lives there. When I thought our lives are getting better and soon we will have a life filled with joy and abundance, - my husband died. I cried for days. I became a widow. It was not my plan. I did not move on this land to be a widow... But I had hope. I had hope in my two sons. They were young and healthy. For my joy they got married. I was not happy they got married the Moabite women... but in this situation I could not offer them any other choices. So Mahlon got married to a beautiful women Oprah. My joy was doubled when Chilion got married to Ruth. Honestly, I did not care that much who are their wives... I was just happy so I can have a some grandsons in my family. Life is hard, but with my sons and with their sons, we I will be secure and I will be provided. I do not know what did I do wrong... I do not know why... But most horrible thing happened in my life. My both sons died. I thought moving to another country will hard. And it was. Loosing my husband is the biggest loss and pain I will experience... But why God? Why are you punishing me so harsh? Really? Why did you took away both of my sons?... I continued to praise and worship you in this foreign land. I had faith in you... You took my hope and left me with nothing...I am left with nothing. I am nothing. My life is ended.

I can not remember how many days, months I have cried and mourn... But I realized I can not die, though I wish... I realized I might lost everything... but God, my YAHWE is still letting me to live... I have to have strength and face the life. Somehow it sounded the best idea if I will go back to Judah. It is my land. There I have my people... I have to go home. I have to start my life and start from the beginning. As I started my journey back to Judah, my two daughters in law followed me. As we started a long journey back, about 70 miles, I realized, that I should let my daughters to go back. As more as I thought as more I was certain about it. First, I think they need to go back so they can remarry. Second, I think even for me it will be better to go back without Moabites women. It will be hard for me to survive but for all three of us I think it will be even harder to find shelter and find mercy from others. Everybody will judge me... Everybody will give me looks... I can hear them saying... look, isn't this Naomi? She is coming back... now she is coming home, She ran away for better and look at her! She comes back with nothing. Worse than nothing she comes back with two Moabite women!

So I gave a blessing to both of my daughters in-law. I kissed them and send them back to Moab. But the strangest thing happened. They did not wanted to go. Both of them insisted to stay. It is very kind but I think they did not think very well. I am old. There is no way I will have more sons. Even if I will have sons today they can not wait till they grow up! Can't they see the reality? I urged them to go back. So finally Orpah agreed and turned to go back. But Ruth... From the beginning I found her a little bit weird. She was very kind to me. She was very loyal to me and my family. What I found most fascinating about her is that she accepted our God. Ruth fully devoted to our God and it became her God. I would secretly watch her. I tried to find some fault in her. But I could not. Her faith, her love her life...the words that would describe her would be -loving and kind.

Another thing I found about her she was stubborn. She was strong in her character and it was a blessing and a curse. When I urge her to go back you know what she said: "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". These words were filled with care and love. Even my husband did not tell me he will go with me where I will go... But Ruth? She was determined to stick with me. I know we had a good relationship, I know she loved my son and she cares about me... But I am her mother-in-law! There is no ties for us, I have nothing to give her. I am foreigner to her. She will be a foreigner in my country... Above all she is choosing our Lord to be her Lord! Her faith in my God I think is stronger than mine... What is the reasons she wants to stay with me? I wanted to argue with her even stronger, to prove her that she is making a bad decision, but Ruth continue: "Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." She will not even leave me after I die... She will stay loyal to me and to my God after even I will be dead... At that point I had no words... I actually did not know what to say. The rest of our way to Judah I was pondering her words... Why Ruth want to be with me? It was hard to believe that somebody would love me to stay for me. I can not believe that somebody would totally be willing to give their life for my life...Somebody not be concern about their own future. How can somebody do that? Why would somebody give their life to save my life? Why would somebody love me more than they love themselves? What kind of love is it?

Finally we arrived in Bethlehem. The whole town was stirred. I thought it is a bad idea for us both to come back. Like I imagined . On every corner I go I hear: "I look at Naomi. She is back..." All the people are gossiping about me and how God has turned away from my family. People are pointing fingers at me. At that moment I decided to be no more Naomi. My name will be Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I did not want to see anybody, I did not want to talk to anybody. Not even to Ruth. I just wanted to die. My life is worthless. I have no present and no future. I just wish everybody would leave me alone, forget about me. But this women, the Moabite women... She was talking to me again. She came up with another "brilliant" idea. She told me: "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." What can I say? If she want to do that... whatever... She is probably again does not realize what is waiting for her in these fields. I know we are very very poor. But gleaning in these fields is another ball game...People will insult you, some man will try take an advantage of you. Since she is Moabite she will probably have to deal with another level of insults. She most likely will not get anything because she will have to wait till all the local poor will get their grains. But you know what I said to her: "Go, my daughter".

It was dark when I saw Ruth coming back. I could not believe what I saw! She had about 6 gallons of barley grain and some food for me. My God and my Lord! Am I dreaming? Praise you for provision and for grace you showed to Ruth. Maybe God is not finished... Maybe there is still something good will come out. Maybe God's grace is still for me... I could't even eat and I was very hungry, I wanted to know all where did Ruth gleaned and how did she ended up with so many barley grains? Ruth told me that she worked at Boaz field. As soon as she mentioned the name I knew who he is ! He is actually a close relative of mine.

I might lost everything but I did not loose my mind. After she told me how Boaz treated her, how he talked to her... I knew exactly what needs to happen next. Ruth is young she needs some guidance and help. And I have a plan. I told Ruth that she need to have a bath, put some perfume, put the nicest clothes and go back to the field. I have to give all the details and I knew, my Ruth will listen to me. I told her, she has to wait, till Boaz will eat and drink. You do not want approach a hungry man. After he lays down, I told: "lay at his feet and uncover his feet". Boaz will know that it means a total submission. Boaz knows that he can be a kinsman redeemer. We had nothing to lose and I was certain it will work. Suddenly in my heart I had a sparkle of hope. Suddenly in my heart I got an assurance that it is not the end of my life.

I send Ruth and I stayed on my knees in prayer all the time. I prayed. I prayed Ruth will be redeemed by Boaz. I prayed God would redeem us from our hopeless situation. I started suddenly to thank God for His plan, for His timing. I started to praise God for he has a way to redeem us from hopelessness to a life with hope and new beginning.

Very early in the morning I see Ruth coming back. I see her hardly carrying something in her shawl. I jumped to meet her and hear what has happened. Boaz looked and talked to her favorably... He gave her more barley to bring for me... I told her: This man will have no rest until he solves the matter”.

Boaz told her, that there is another relative that is even closer than Boaz. But I knew, I knew that this other man will not do it. He will not redeem us. He cares too much about himself and his won children. He knows that it will diminish heritage to his own kids. I knew if he would be willing he would come to us and helped us long time ago... But Boaz. I know he likes Ruth, I know he believes in God and keeps all the commandments. Boaz has wealth and he will be our redeemer.

You know what happen next? Ruth got married to Boaz. Didn't I tell you I knew a plan?! I knew it will work. After 9 month I was a grandmother! I took this baby into my hands and I smiled. I took this baby in my hands and praise God. I thought my life is lost, I thought the death of my husband and of my both sons is the end. But it was not the end in God's plan. It was a new beginning for his plan. I only had Ruth... and I thought what can come out of this foreigner daughter in law! But God sees the heart, God hears and sees and He provided a new life. You want to hear what people are saying now? Listen to them now: “Blessed be the Lord who has not left you without redeemer, may his name be proclaimed throughout the Israrel. He will restore your life and sustain you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth to him. She's better for you than seven sons.”

You know what this baby means to me? It is my life is secure. I will be around this baby all the time. I will care for him, I will watch for him I will feed him. This is my baby....This baby was provided for me. People named him Obed, saying a son has been born to Naomi! Praise God. Praise God! PRAISE GOD!