

Directed Prayer - me, each person next to you, yourself

I. Introduction

A. What do we expect from our lives with Jesus?

1. Satisfaction - that God will satisfy all my good desires ... in a now-and-later timeframe. That God will adequately provide for me.
2. The problem is that we tend to have a wrong understanding of "provide."
 - a. We assume we are here to have a good time, if not good circumstances, then at least good feelings (I should feel better).
 - b. So, we invent "biblical" strategies for seeing our dreams and desires fulfilled - models of godly parenting, disciplines of spiritual living, and principles of financial stewardship - all designed to give us a good time

****There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting a good time but what we are attempting is to feel now what we won't feel until Heaven. We desire to experience an overwhelming goodness that eliminates all pain. And as long as our intent is to have a good time, God becomes a means to an end rather than our greatest lover to be enjoyed.**

**Our desire is to use God rather than to enjoy Him.

B. Ruth deals with real questions.

1. How do I trust a sometimes disappointing, seemingly fickle God Who fails to do for me what a good friend, if they could, would do?
2. Is a life surrendered to Christ really worth it?

**Over the weeks, we are going to be walking through Ruth and these questions, and I believe that somewhere in the process we will find true hope in Jesus Christ.

II. Ruth 1

A. Verses 1-5: Naomi's crumbling dream

1. Days of the Judges
 - a. 400-year period after Israel entered the Promised Land with Joshua and before there were kings over Israel
 - b. Judges 21:25 (Cycle: People sin; God disciplines by sending enemies; people cry out to God; God restores Israel by raising a judge and delivers them.)

"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

**What we see in Ruth is God's work in the midst of very dark days.

2. Death of Naomi's dream

a. Famine (Leviticus 26:3-4)

"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit."

b. Went to Moab

- 1) Pagan nation with pagan idols
- 2) Walk by sight not by faith

c. Husband dies

d. Sons marry foreign wives (not ethnicity but spiritual)

e. Sons die (10 years after husband)

B. Verses 6-7: Naomi's return

1. Heard the famine was over, end attributed to God's direct involvement
2. Left Israel with more than she returned to

C. Verses 8-15: Naomi's growing hopelessness

1. Naomi has nothing - not even hope.
 - a. Dreams have been shattered.
 - b. Not just circumstances, but she is not even worth being around.
2. Culture and customs have failed to give any hope.

D. Verses 16-18: Ruth's faithfulness and hope

1. Giving up
 - a. Leaving her own family and land
 - b. An opportunity to get re-married and have children
 - c. Going to an unknown land with unknown culture, customs, and language
 - d. Idols/gods that she had grown up with
2. What she gains
 - a. Hopeless and bitter mother-in-law
 - b. The God of Israel (some great stories but not from mom)

**She will never return to her homeland.

E. Verses 19-21: Naomi's theology

1. Unshaken: God exists, God is sovereign, God has dealt harshly with her.
2. Missing: Genesis 50:20

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

- a. Life of Joseph was very similar.
- b. Dual design
3. Wrong: Our dreams are the best dreams and there can't be better ones.

- a. **Our greatest dreams, the ones we see as essential for our happiness, must be fully abandoned if we are to know God well.**
- b. **Shattered dreams are devastatingly painful.**
- c. **When we truly know and trust God, He will replace those dreams with better and indestructible ones.**

Death and Resurrection Doodle

F. Verse 22: Glimmer of hope

1. "Beginning of barely harvest."
 - a. Glimpse of excitement, hope is on the way, the sun peeking over the horizon
 - b. Naomi can't see it, but hope is there - God's hand of providence that led her this far is on the move.
2. Different perspectives
 - a. Naomi: slave to her misery and there is no hope for a future (the past defines the future)
 - b. Ruth: true freedom
 - 1) **If we choose to trust the sovereign goodness and mercy of God to pursue us, then we can experience true freedom, the freedom to do anything and go anywhere God leads us to.**
 - 2) The freedom to leave all that Ruth left—home, familiarity, stability, etc.,—and have concrete hope that God loves and is committed to her best

**Somewhere deep inside, Ruth recognizes the words of the great military general who said, "Hope is like the sun. If you only believe in it when you can see it you'll never make it through the night."

**Listen to what Paul says about stories like those of Naomi and Ruth in the Bible in Romans 15:4.

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

III. Conclusion

- A. **If we are to discover a hope that continues through shattered dreams, that hope must be available to everyone regardless of their circumstances. We must find a hope available to sick people, poor people, lonely people, unnoticed people. And it must be the same hope we offer to healthy, rich people with lots of friends and talent. We must discover a hope that thrives when dreams shatter, when sickness advances and poverty worsens and loneliness deepens and obscurity continues, the same hope that anchors us to God when dreams do come true." (Larry Crabb)**

- B. That hope is birthed out of our death - the beginning of the spiritual life with Christ when we have humbly surrendered our lives and our dreams to Him.
1. If you are in a place today of hopelessness, like Naomi, know that God is not absent or against you but He is right beside you.
 2. If you are in a place today of transition, like Ruth, know that if you trust in the sovereign goodness and mercy of God, you can find true freedom.
 3. Regardless of where you are, I want you to know this morning that Jesus is worth more than anything we can gain in this life, and as we allow our ideas and dreams to be broken down He has dreams ready for us that we cannot even begin to imagine!