

Series: Biblical Heroes and Zeros – week 8

CDOBC – beginning on 10/17/10

Title: “Ruth - Faithful in Distress”

January 9, 2011

Ruth 1-4

OBJECTIVE: To help believers

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
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Opening prayer – shooting at Safeway, Rep. Giffords and 12 others injured, 6 dead (Judge John Roll - 63, Gabe Zimmerman - 30, Christina Taylor Green - 9, Dorwan Stoddard - 76, Dorothy Morris - 76, Phyllis Schneck - 79)

Being a Christian...a follower of Christ does not guarantee a smooth and easy life. But many believers struggle with their faith and trust in God when their life takes a disastrous turn. Those who struggle in this area believe God’s sovereignty should keep all harm from them and their loved ones, and when this doesn’t happen, they question God, get angry at Him, and begin to distrust His love, care, and concern for their life.

As we resume our series of “*Biblical Heroes & Zeros*”, and as we are at the beginning of a New Year, I want to look at the life of Ruth, and see what makes her Biblical Hero. Like Job, Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi, find themselves in desperate circumstances. Just when you think life hit’s rock bottom, the bottom drops again. In the book of Ruth, we’ll see the pessimism of Naomi, and the solid faith of Ruth. Ruth is a Biblical hero because her faith in God motivated her to a new life with great adventure. The only certainty in her life would be the LORD, but

she presses on not knowing what the future would hold for her physical welfare.

Turn to the book of Ruth

Responding to disaster in life vs. 1-14

Read 1:1-14

Moab was located on the eastern border of the land of Canaan – the nation of Israel. The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges (1:1), so the nation of Israel was still quite fragmented – under more of a tribal rule – at a time before the monarchy was established – and the loyalty or faithfulness to God was just as fragmented as their political system.

There was a great famine in the land, and Naomi’s family moves across the Jordan, to Moab in search of food. The text tells us they (“...went to live for a while in the country of Moab.”). It seems as though they realized their permanent home was in the Promised Land – in Bethlehem, but they left for what looked like a better opportunity. Now, this was a dangerous move. Israel...the Promised Land was their God-given home. To leave Israel was to go and live among a people whose entire way of life revolved around false gods.

Judges 10:6

“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab...”

The **first disaster** to strike was the famine in Israel. After they move to Moab, **disaster strikes again** when Naomi's husband dies. Her sons then marry two Moabite women, and after about ten years, both her sons die...**disaster #3**. And insult on top of injury, her daughter's-in-law were both barren, which means their future had no means of income and financial security in that culture...**disaster #4**.

First the famine...then her husband's death...then both her sons die...childless!

How would you respond if disaster like this came into your life?

Do you respond with pessimism and frustration toward God?
Do you trust God, having confidence in His sovereign control of life, even when you experience pain and loss?

Do you try and fix things on your own...without God's help or permission?

To her credit, Naomi never lost faith in God, but her weakness is that her family tries to solve their problems in their own way. Their move to Moab was not explicitly forbidden, but in principle, it was looking beyond God's provision in Canaan. God had called His people to be separate from the other nations – and moving to Moab didn't follow the principle of that command.

And then there is the matter of her son's marriage to foreign women.

Deut. 7:1-3

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations--the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you...Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your sons away from

following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.”

The marriage to Moabite women was not explicitly forbidden by God, but the principle applies. The principle is this:

Don't marry someone who is not a believer / follower of God (Christ).

Naomi is like many Christians today. She believes in God. Her belief in His existence and His sovereignty is unwavering. However, she struggles in living and trusting in God's personal provision for her. She tries to live life according to what seems best to her in the circumstances.

Judges 21:25

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”

Living this way brought great disaster upon Israel, and it will bring great disaster in our life also. Living in this manner reveals the weakness of our faith in God's daily care for us. It reveals that our trust is more in our own solutions, not in Him.

Naomi attributes the famine and the death of her husband and sons to God's hand against her (vs. 21). She probably believes that God's judgment is upon her because they fled the Promised Land to live in Moab, and because her sons married foreign women.

Compare Naomi's outlook to Joseph's outlook.

Joseph suffered great injustice...sold as a slave...falsely accused of attempted rape and imprisoned...forgotten by those he helped. For thirteen years he endured these hardships. But Joseph saw these disasters in his life as God's hand in bringing to reality His divine plan. Only toward the

end of the plan could Joseph see what God had been doing, but he never lost faith and confidence in God. So the question is, “How do *you* respond to disaster?” Are you like Naomi, or like Joseph?

God is at work in the midst of disaster 1:15-2:23

God had provided for Naomi – but Naomi was unable to see God’s provision and care for her because all she saw was the judgment of God. It’s important to note: Naomi interpreted these disasters as the judgment of God, but nowhere is that belief confirmed in the text. Just because Naomi thinks it’s God’s judgment doesn’t mean it actually is God’s judgment. What Naomi didn’t / couldn’t know / realize is that God had great plans for her and her daughter-in-law Ruth. In the midst of the grief in Moab, God brought Ruth to Naomi, but she didn’t see Ruth as a great blessing from God – until later. God had brought an end to the famine in Israel...another source of hope in the midst of disaster. Also, there was a man, Boaz, in Bethlehem – a relative – a kinsman redeemer – who would bring new hope into Naomi’s heart.

A quick note on what a *kinsmen redeemer* was (Deut. 25:5-10).

In the event that a man died without any male offspring, the Mosaic Law provided for the continuation of his family’s name and estate by having the next closest relative marry his widow. If they were to have a son, that son would carry on the name of the deceased. This provided a way for the family name and possessions of the deceased to continue on in his family.

In this section, we also see some details about Ruth – specifically:

Ruth’s Godly character

Her care for Naomi vs. 2:2-3

Ruth's work ethic vs. 2:5-6

Ruth 2:2-3

"And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³ So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters."

Ruth 2:5-6

Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" The foreman replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."

Ruth's humility – vs. 2:10, 13

Read 2:7-13

Humility is a valuable trait...a humble person is a teachable person. A humble person tends to be more content with their life. We see that the entire town seems to be aware of what Ruth has done when she left her country to live with Naomi. Even after such high praise from Boaz, Ruth places herself below the servant girls (vs. 13).

God sovereignly leads us. vs. 3b

"As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech."

“As it turned out...” – This is the hand of God...not chance...not luck.

God was providing for Ruth and Naomi the entire time, and now He leads her to the field of Boaz, who was kin to Naomi’s late husband.

No matter what your situation in life – no matter what pain or disaster has come your way, God is not unaware – God is not unconcerned – He is not overwhelmed. He is at work – putting together the pieces of His divine plan.

I don’t have time to work through chapter 3, but briefly, chapter 3 contains the righteous plans that Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth strategically put into effect to have Boaz marry Ruth. Then, in chapter 4, we see those plans carried out to the end, and we see that:

God uses disasters to bring blessings. 4:1-22

In vs. 1-12, Boaz makes the legal commitments necessary to take Ruth as his wife, in the role of kinsmen redeemer.

Then, in vs. 13, we see what God was up to the whole time.

4:13-15

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

This is quite a statement about Ruth – in a culture that preferred male offspring.

God provides a son for Naomi and Ruth. God provided a Godly man in Boaz to fulfill the role of the Kinsmen Redeemer. The son's name was Obed.

Read vs. 16-17

“Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. 17 The women living there said, “Naomi has a son.” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

God's provision for Naomi and His blessing for her family was far greater than she could have ever imagined. Her family became part of the Davidic line which led not only to the greatest King Israel ever had – King David – but the Davidic line was also the family line the Messiah would come through!

Ruth's son, Obed, is listed in Luke's genealogy, and Ruth herself is listed specifically in Matthew's genealogy.

Matt. 1:5-6

“Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.”

What an amazing honor and blessing.

Notice an amazing fact here about God's grace and His unique ways of working through history to accomplish His divine plan. Not only is Ruth – a foreigner – included in the Davidic and Messianic line, but Rahab is also included!

What a testimony to the work of God and how He accomplishes His will and His plan in ways we would never imagine!

Application

Develop faith like Ruth.

Trust God's love and care during disaster.

Close in prayer