

A Very Mara Christmas - Ruth 1 **Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

Notes from the Sermon

Now that we're in December, alongside the colder weather, the Christmas season has officially begun. Coffee shops have chucked the pumpkin spice in favor of ginger, pecan, chestnut, praline nog lattes, flashing lights and 50-ft inflatables are everywhere, and The Hallmark Channel Christmas movies are in all-out blitzkrieg mode. Love them or hate them, I would propose that their syrupy-sweet formulaic content is there for a significant reason: ingrained in the human heart is this longing for the good things these movies set out to portray. People want to be loved unconditionally. We long for fullness, resolution and redemption. The Old Testament narrative of Ruth can help point us toward the true fulfillment of these feelings, as we see God working in the micro (a small love story) to accomplish the macro (His overarching plan of salvation through Jesus Christ).

The book opens with a jam-packed 5-verse prologue. Our story takes place in the days when judges ruled the land - a time of chaos and anarchy. The last verse of the book gives us the picture: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) So even here, we begin to see the emptiness at play - Israel was empty of anything godly. Against that backdrop, the little town of Bethlehem (which means "house of bread") experienced a famine. We see very quickly that amid that famine, an Israelite man named Elimelech decides to lead his wife Naomi and their two sons out of the promised land to find food in Moab, a neighboring land known for pagan idolatry. The text states that their family remained there, and after some time, Elimelech died. Their sons marry Moabite women, and then after 10 years, both sons die, leaving behind no children. Naomi is now left with no husband, no sons, and no grandchildren to carry on their family line - a truly bitter prospect. Naomi has experienced such great emptiness; she is now left with only two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

In verse 6, Naomi hears that God has visited His people in Bethlehem and provided food, so she decides it is time to return to the promised land, to God's presence. Upon leaving, Orpah and Ruth initially intend to go with Naomi, but her insistence deters Orpah; only Ruth clings to Naomi, who subsequently proclaims her commitment to remain with Naomi and, more importantly, make The Lord her God. Ruth has chosen to leave behind all that she's known in her statement, which echoes God's own covenant words to His people: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16) With that, Ruth and Naomi set out for Bethlehem.

Upon arriving at Bethlehem, Naomi is met with people recalling her, asking if she is truly Naomi. Her response is probably more than they'd expected, as she states "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty." It is only the final verse that contains a hint of hope for the future: "And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." (Ruth 1:22)

Through the story of Ruth, we can see the sovereign God of the universe sometimes bestows unexpected emptiness to bring about incomprehensible fullness. At the micro level, we see God beginning to restore fullness in a variety of ways. He brings bread to Bethlehem by visiting His people (verse 6). He begins to bring familial fullness to Naomi in the form of Ruth the Moabite, who has miraculously been brought to fullness of belief, welcomed into God's family. And we ultimately see the initial glimmer of future hope in verse 22, which signifies the end of the physical emptiness of famine in Bethlehem, and conjures images of a hopeful new beginning and an end to spiritual emptiness for both Naomi and Ruth.

But in addition to the main characters of our story, we can see God is at work at the

macro level, bringing fullness to Israel and beyond. The final verses of the book of Ruth show us the fullness of God's trajectory, as we see that ultimately, God provides a son that will lead to the birth of David, the future king of Israel. David will then lead to the ultimate provision of the Messiah, Jesus Christ - the fullness of God made manifest, fully God and fully man. Through Christ, the world is given the perfect bread of life, the family we've always longed for (the church), whose foundation is Christ Himself, the savior we can believe and trust in, and the ultimate future hope we long for in Heaven with God, where ALL emptiness will be wiped away forever.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Judges 14	Judges 15	Judges 16	Judges 17	Judges 18	Judges 19	Judges 20

Reading from this past week: Ruth 1

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Ruth 2

Family Worship

Song - *Crown Him*

<https://youtu.be/lkIUZWQk6PU?si=T3mVCGavqWQLRAdC>

Gospel Project

Unit: Jesus is alive

Story: Jesus appeared to His disciples

Big Picture Question: How do we know that God wants us to know Him?

Answer: We can know

that God wants us to know Him because He has revealed Himself through His Word.

Scripture: Luke 24

New City Catechism

Question #48: Where is Christ now?

Answer: Christ rose bodily from the grave on the third day after his death and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Verse: Ephesians 1:20-21

Scripture

Ruth 1

- What do you think of Naomi's response to the emptiness dealt to her? Does she sin in her response?
- What are some ways you have experienced emptiness? Are you able to see how God might be using this emptiness in His sovereign plan to bring about fullness? If not, do you think you will someday? Don't be afraid to be honest.
- How do we see the fullness and sovereignty of God beyond the human events of this story?

Prayer

*Ask God to help you grow in your theology and that true theology would lead to worship.

*Pray for our Gift of Love Christmas Store

*The second candle of the Advent wreath is called the Candle of Bethlehem and Love. It reminds that God chose the humble city of Bethlehem to send His Son to show how much He loved us. Light the second candle and give thanks for God's love.