

A Sermon preached by Martin Tanner in St Mary's, Market Drayton on Thursday 8th September at 10.00am

SS1: RUTH CHAPTER 1

It is 40 years ago this month that I first met my wife Ruth! So, what better reason than to start a sermon series on the Book of Ruth, one of the great books of the Bible and which can be read in one sitting, so I suggest you all do. And soon!

A. The story of Ruth is simple

A couple and their two sons live in Bethlehem, then famine comes and they move to Moab. Whilst there the two sons marry. Then the husband dies and the two sons die also. Three widows are left. Naomi, Orpah and Ruth. Not a child between them. Their lives have just fallen apart.

Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law to return to their homes in Moab and find another husband and she, herself, will go back to Bethlehem.

Orpah does so. But Naomi refuses and, in v16, memorably says, ***"Where you go I will go; Where you stay I will stay; Your people will be my people; Your God will be my God."***

Here is one of the MOST PROFOUND statements of personal commitment in the whole Bible: It is TOTAL, it is LIFELONG, it is FAITHFUL, UNCONDITIONAL and IRRECOCABLE.

And it mirrors-back God's covenant, steadfast love, for us.

And at the time of the barley harvest Naomi and Ruth do arrive in Bethlehem. But 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."

The Book of Ruth begins in tears. It is all about LOSS. And so the Book of Ruth has parallels with the Book of Job. Job also lost everything but would not curse God.

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B. The book of Ruth is about salvation history

Ironically, the dominant character in the Book of Ruth is NOT Ruth **but NAOMI**, her Mother-in-Law. But it is not called 'the Book of Naomi' because it is RUTH who becomes one of our Lord's ancestors.

Ruth meets Boaz, the son of Rahab the prostitute, marries him, and becomes the mother of Obed, the grandfather of the great King David and so is one of the ancestors of Christ, who is "Great David's Greater Son."

The Book of Ruth is about two redemptions: That of the widow, Ruth, and of us All!

It is all about salvation history.

C. The book of Ruth is great literature

One commentator says, "*What Venus is to statutes and the Mona Lisa is to painting, Ruth is to literature.*" Part of the power of the Book of Ruth is its literary quality. Many a good story is spoiled by bad telling but when a story is told brilliantly we can do more than just learn its lessons, we can actually experience the story for ourselves and enter into it fully.

Ruth is so well told we can journey with her, we are right there with her. So we are not given pat answers to difficult questions but can go on a journey and discover insights for ourselves. Ruth is great literature.

D. The story of Ruth is profound, deep.

Often the Bible is about Kings and Rulers, Generals, Leaders, Heroes and important people. Not so the Book of Ruth.

It is rather the story of ordinary people facing ordinary events. The story of a certain man and his family and their fortunes and misfortunes.

Its about loss, hurt, despair and shattered dreams. The very first verse summarizes the theme of the book, "*there was a famine in the land.*" A famine in all senses of that word.

This is important, because it reminds us that the God of the Nations is also **concerned with ordinary people like us** and our fortunes and misfortunes.

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The Book looks at what it means to live as a follower of God in a fallen world.

We see God at work in the ordinary.

- God at work in the pain.
- God at work through pain.
- God at work in hard circumstances.

Further, we see God at work **outside of his chosen people**. For Ruth is a nobody. She is from Moab, the land settled by Lot and his descendants. But Moab was a cursed nation, condemned because of way they treated Israel in wilderness.

AND YET God **still uses** such a person.

The Book of Ruth is simple yet profound, it is personal yet also about our salvation and it is great literature.

Let us read it and see where it takes us!