

SERMON TITLE: Ruth's Noble Choice
SCRIPTURE: Ruth 1
SERMON DATE 10 June 2007

I would like to thank our visiting missionaries, the Lockhart's for sharing about a decision that they made, that set the course for the rest of their lives. Their decision has resulted in the eternal difference, the forever salvation, of countless lives of people from all around the world, including those of their children.

Most of us are in situations right now where the decisions we make WILL determine the direction the rest of our lives take. It could be as insignificant a decision as forgetting to buckle our seat belt. That one minor decision taken on the wrong day when we had a car accident might mean that we end up dead or severely handicapped.

I don't have to tell you about other decisions that will affect you deeply. Should you be married? If so, to whom? With what advisor should you study? What will your major study be? What job should you take?

But the most important decision we will ever make in our lives is about God. It is the one that will determine where we spend eternity. Eternity is a LONG time!

If we like doing everything OUR way and we like making decisions ALONE, then more than likely our eternal future will be spent ALONE. And I mean ALONE, without God, perhaps without anyone. Hell is the absence of God and of Love.

As Christians, we choose to believe that Jesus' Words in the Bible are True. He said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. Anyone who Believes in Him will go to the Father God, they will have eternal life with God. John 3:16-18? (Read on Screen

Therefore, I urge you today to think DEEPLY about your futures. IF you continue on the same path you are today, where will you end up?

At one level, your decision will determine WHERE you spend eternity, in Heaven or in Hell.

At another level, your decision about what your work should be determines your immediate and perhaps your future for the rest of your earthly life.

It is good to ask ourselves:

Is my job NOW where I want to be in 10 years? If not, why not consider recharting your course soon, so that you will be where you hope to be in 10 years.

To remind you again, the word CAREER, meaning an occupation, has it's roots in the Latin word *to run*. The word VOCATION which can also mean a profession or occupation, has it's roots in the Latin word for *CALLING*. A Vocation implies that God has CALLED us to a particular work. But a Career appears to be a more worldly work that does not last into eternity.

To tell you the truth, if I am running on the wheel of life like this mouse, I would rather run in such a way that my efforts would last into eternity, rather than end when my life ends or the research I did is superseded or the the product I make dies.

I suspect that you too, would like to make an eternal difference somehow in the world or better yet, in some persons' lives.

It's not always clear to KNOW what God is calling us to do with our lives. Today, you heard Darryl Lockhart share how circumstances and opportunities funneled him into a decision to serve with a missionary agency. He had to overcome the criticism of his family and he and Loa had to live in far away countries with his large family, and ()

But his heart and mind both told him and Loa that it was God's plan that they leave their jobs and enter into a new life adventure, one that would in fact use their University taught skills, to allow God's word to reach more people of the globe.

Today we will begin a 3 part series about 2 women who made life changing decisions that affected a nation and ultimately, the world. They too, left their homes. Their decisions about the way they would live and follow God, have made a difference in the history of their nation and the world.

Today I would like to begin telling you the tragic and fascinating story of a family who lived a thousands years before Jesus. They were Jesus' ancestors.

Actually the reason that we even HAVE this little vignette of one family's history, is because they were the grandparents and great grandparents of the Great Jewish King, King David. No Doubt this story gained

prominence when David became King and many people asked, "Who is he?" which really means: "Who is his family?"

We will read today, the first chapter of the Book of Ruth. There are 4 chapters in this book and it takes about 17 minutes to read through the whole book. I hope that you will vow to read the whole book this week and the next 2 weeks. You will be blessed as you put yourself in this story.

This story about Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, has a parallel to the Lockhart's story of journeying to other cultures. We did not know that the Lockhart's would join us this Sunday when we chose this book.

I am continually amazed how God helps us to pick Sunday teaching passages that fit into our lives.

The relationship of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, ALSO is a beautiful example of discipleship. And we have been hearing about disciple-making from Pastor Dale Crall who taught us 4 times this past week. If you didn't hear him, I will just say that his message reminds us about the importance of obeying Jesus' command to not only BE his disciple ("*Believe and receive Me*" Jesus said many times) BUT Jesus' final words to his disciples were to GO and Make disciples. We are to Be Disciple Makers.

Naomi, the mother-in-law, WAS a disciple maker. Her Disciple, RUTH, became a loving and dedicated daughter-in-law, who loved Naomi's Jewish God.

It will help you if I explain the context and some details of the culture first.

This story takes place in a country to the East of Israel, called Moab. The Moabites were sometimes friends with Israel, but more often than Not, the cousin nations fought. Elimelech and his Wife, Naomi, and 2 sons, had left their own nation, Israel and their city, Bethlehem, because of a famine in their land. (By the way Bethlehem means House of Food, or House of Bread.)

The prophets said that the reason that the fertile land around Bethlehem was NOT producing enough grain was because Israel had forgotten God.

This true story takes place at the end of the book called Judges. Allow me to tell you just a little of what Israel was like at that time. Perhaps you will understand WHY there were troubles in Israel.

Israel had no King, but a God given system of government where God appointed men AND women as HIS prophets and His generals and His priests. They were to Govern and protect the new 12 tribe nation of Israel as God's representatives.

Unfortunately, the nation, after Moses and Joshua had helped the people conquer their promised Land of Israel, FORGOT God. They Spiraled down into depravity. Here's what the Bible said about their times throughout the Book of Judges. Tell me if you think this sounds familiar for our times too: "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." (Judges 17:6, 21:25, etc.) Everyone did what was right in their own eyes."

That was their state of affairs. Everyone did what they sexually thought was right or what THEY wanted to do. People murdered. People worshipped anyone or anything but GOD! They even offered their children to idol gods as sacrifices. They decided to kill their own babies because they thought it would make their lives better and their gods happier.

Does this in anyway sound like our world today? (Sexual freedoms, murder, idolatry, and Child sacrifice, which we today call abortion?)

My purpose is NOT to discuss the book called Judges, but to give you an idea of the sorry state of Elimelech's & Naomi's world. If you do read the Book of Judges, you will discover a cyclical pattern: The Israelites went their own ways, then God would judge them with bad times and defeats, and then they would cried out to God for Help. In a former message I called this their Call, Fall, and Cure-all. It was a very bad and sad time for the people of God.

One more cultural explanation before we read the first Chapter of Ruth: Since GOD was the true head of the Israelites' government, God had set up systems and rules to help the people live well. Besides the 10 Commandments, there were other laws laid out by the priests of the tribe of Levi.

For example, without a welfare system such as we have now, if a woman was widowed, God mandated that the dead husband's BROTHER should marry her. This would prevent women and their children from poverty. If in this new marriage, they had a son together, the son would be considered the dead husband's son, thus carrying on his family line and inheritance. This is called a Levirate marriage. This custom plays a big part in the story of King David's grandfather.

With all this in mind, let us read the beautiful story of Noble Ruth and her Godly mother-in-law, Naomi.
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In chapter one, we see a family become refugees or at least Immigrants because of a famine of FOOD in their country. We hear about first the husband's death, and then the death of the 2 Sons. Three women are left without support.

The Mother-in-law, Naomi, decides since they have no one to help them, they must return to her hometown. Tragedy upon tragedy besets this family, until Naomi, sees her life as very bitter. Don't call me Naomi, which means *pleasant*. Call me Mara, or *BITTER*.

(By the way *Bitter* is the meaning for all names with roots in Mara, such as Mary, Maria, Muriel. . . there are over 100 such names. Many names in the Bible have meanings significant to individuals' and even Israel's histories. Of course, many Christians today use the name, Mary, because of the connection to Jesus' special Mother: Mary.)

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.
21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Have YOU felt that way before? Have you felt that The Lord God, who is supposed to keep you and satisfy you, (for that is the meaning of the Almighty God, El Shaddai in Hebrew), that God, has made your life a mess? Things were going well and you felt full, but then the bottom fell out and you were empty and alone and Angry at God?

You are not alone. I believe that all of us, even those who have followed Jesus for a long time, have had times in our lives when we felt this way.

But the CHOICE of how we will respond to our life's circumstances is OURS. WE have the power to choose.

Naomi walked the path of Bitterness_

But RUTH_who also suffered from the same hunger and poverty that Naomi experienced and the loss of a husband and father-in-law, CHOSE to remain FAITHFUL. To Stay with Naomi.

Ruth was willing, even though Naomi tried to talk her out of it, Ruth was willing to walk Miles from her home country, to a completely new country, where many people would see her as an enemy of the Jewish people.

Let's read again some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. They are often used at weddings:
Ruth 1: **16** But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. 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 punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"

Why was this? Why was Ruth willing to give up her own country and family to stay with her Mother-In-Law?

It must be

1. That Naomi was a wonderful person. She must have loved her daughter-in-law in a special way.
2. Ruth must have not only experienced Naomi's love, but Ruth must have desired something from Naomi. It wasn't Naomi's riches, for they were very poor. I believe that Ruth had learned about Naomi's God. Ruth's country of Moab, was a pagan land, where idols, statues and fertility gods were worshipped. Ruth must have desired to know more about the Jewish God, from the Land of Israel.

You see, people in those days thought that each country had their own gods. At the borders, the god you worshipped had to switch to a different god.

(Even today, I have heard instances of Saudi's who believe that after they leave their country they need not worry about their god. When they arrive in say Paris or New York they can eat pork, drink alcohol and visit prostitutes, all of which are forbidden in the Koran.)

Ruth wanted to know Naomi's God better. She wanted to become a part of the people who worshipped the God that her Mother-in-law, Naomi, worshipped, El Shaddai, the Almighty provider.

(For those of you who like Biblical scholarship, it is interesting to note that Naomi uses 3 names for

God. El Shaddai is a word that has pagan roots. Elohim is the plural name for God (it was used in the Bible at Creation) and Adonai found together with El Shaddai in vs. 21 is the substitute name for God, since the Jews never wanted to pronounce God's name that was revealed to Moses.) We saw YHWH or Yahweh for this name. But we don't know the exact pronunciation.

If you want to know God better, as Ruth did, then I suggest that you begin to study the various descriptive names for God. We sing them often.

IF you Don't know HOW to use various names for God, then do what Ruth did. Hang around with someone who does.

Naomi DISCIPLED Ruth. Naomi taught Ruth. She counseled Ruth as we will see in the next chapters. And Ruth followed Naomi's directives.

Naomi was a Disciple-Maker, as Dale Crall urged us to be last week.

Perhaps she didn't really realize she was influencing a life for God. But Ruth had watched her cook. Ruth had watched her deal with death and grief. Ruth had watched Naomi strategize how best to survive in life.

Now, Naomi thought it best to return to her own town in the neighboring country of Israel.

I want you to notice how in this chapter some decisions were made that seemed very logical, by human thinking. But perhaps were not what God had desired.

When the famine hit hard in Bethlehem, the husband, Elimelech, thought it best to leave his country and make a better life for himself, his wife and 2 sons.

I might have done the same thing. But SOME people in Bethlehem did not do that. They stayed. They probably prayed to God for help and they survived. By Elimelech's actions, he showed that he didn't trust God enough. His name means My God is King, but he set out and left his support system and fellow God worshippers back home.

Now I am NOT saying that we should never leave home. I have. I am NOT saying that we should never use our Brains to solve our problems. God gave us brains to make decisions.

BUT, GOD is pleased when we ASK God for direction. God is pleased when he remains KING in ALL areas of our lives, in our offices, in our hobbies and free time AND in our studies.

Another person who seems to have followed human logic was the other daughter-in-law, Orpah. She did what I might have done. She listened to her mother-in-law who told her to go back to her own people. She would be comfortable with them and perhaps even find another husband from her own people.

This sounds very rational, doesn't it?

But it was RUTH who would receive the greater blessing. It was RUTH, whose name means *Companion*, who clung to Naomi. She would be a foreigner in a foreign country, Israel, and yet she would give birth to the grandfather of Israel's greatest king! Imagine, a poor woman from the enemy's country would be in the lineage, not only of King David, but in Jesus' geneology. And her story would be recorded for all times in the Bible.

Isn't this just like God, Almighty, to make the poor reknown? The God that we worship has PLANS for his children. Plans for Good, not for evil. Ruth was to learn just how Almighty Naomi's God was!

Yet, Naomi temporarily FORGOT God's strength. She allowed her current situation of poverty and death and despair to focus on her self and NOT on God.

IF she had focused on God in her misery, she would have said to Ruth, Look at us, we are in a terrible situation. My heart is heavy with our losses, but I know GOD and GOD can provide for us. The God I serve and worship is MIGHTY. Let us Praise Him and ASK Him for Help.

She never would have asked people after her return to Bethlehem, to call her BITTER. She would have reminded them that her name, Naomi, means Pleasant. Yes, her life was NOT turning out like she had hoped, but despite what happened to her, she was going to choose to keep her HOPES for the future based on GOD's character.

I have no right to criticize Naomi. She is a remarkable woman. I pray that I will never be in her situation. (God please spare me.)

But ALL of us have times when we go through trials. If you haven't yet, then just wait. God allows us to wade in deep and troubled waters, because God knows that we are strengthened and get closer to Him during those hard days.

We all have a choice, like Ruth did. We can turn around and go back to our old ways of life: worrying, depending on ourselves, whining about our circumstances, and being critical. OR, OR we can choose to hang on to God. We can choose to hang on to a godly person. We can seek out mentors, teachers, older

and wiser Christians who can wade together with us.

The choice is ours. Whom will you choose to cling to?

Let us pray:

LORD Please help us to cling to you.

Help us to find someone that would help us to follow you better.

Father, I ask that you will help many in this church today, find an older, wiser person that would help keep their focus on YOU.

You love disciples AND disciple makers. That was your plan to get the message about you to the whole world.....