

RUTH – 1 of 6
When It's Time To Walk Away
September 22, 2024

INTRODUCTION Today, we are starting a new message series on an Old Testament book of the Bible.

Today, we start the Book of Ruth, and I'm calling it when it's time to walk away.

Let's dive into the word Ruth. Chapter 1, we'll look in verse 1, *¹In the days when the judges ruled,*

In other words, in the days when there were no kings. Now, in the Book of Ruth, if you're looking in a paper Bible, what book comes right before the Book of Ruth? Does anybody know it?

It's the Book of Judges. And there's one verse you see over and over again in the Book of Judges, the very last verse in the Book of Judges says,

²⁵In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

In the days when the judges ruled, everyone did whatever felt right in their own eyes. Sound a little bit like today. Just want to show you the connection.

¹In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

And we're going to see a family who is going to be afraid, they're not going to be able to eat, and so they're going to make a move.

So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

²The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

So, let's break down the characters in this plot.

We have, first of all, **Elimelek**. He is the husband and the father, and his name means **my God is King**.

Then, we have the wife, the mom, **Naomi**. Her name means **sweet or pleasant**.

Then, we have the two children. And to understand how they would name their children in this time is they would generally name their children based on one of two things.

Either they would name them kind of prophetically based on what they wanted to see. Like we would call him strong, or we might call her Godly or pure.

Or they would name them based on what they saw. And in this case, it's very likely they named their children based on what they saw when they were born.

Their two names were **Mahlon**, which means **sick or sickly**, and **Kilion**, which means **frail or tired**.

So, they probably were born and struggled early on. So, their names are sick and tired. I'd like for you to meet my two sons, sick and tired. Some of you are thinking, I didn't know that was an option. Can I change the names of my kids?

So, what you've got is a guy named, my God is King. We've got sweet and pleasant, with sick and tired, and my God is King. Elimelek is worried about his family, because of the famine. So, he moves his family from Bethlehem to Moab.

From Bethlehem, he would've had to go around the Dead Sea to Moab. It's about a 50-mile journey. So, if you walk three miles an hour, it might take you 16 or 17 hours, maybe a long day or a couple days journey to get to Bethlehem.

He leaves Bethlehem and he takes his family to Moab, which ended up being a horrible mistake. God had strictly forbidden His people from living in Moab.

You may say, why? What's wrong with Moab? Well, the Moabites were descendants of Moab. If you don't know who Moab is, you can read about them in Genesis 19.

There's a story when Lot's daughters got their dad drunk, and they slept with him and conceived a son named Moab. So, the Moabites were conceived out of incest, and that was just the beginning of their issues.

They also worshiped the false God, Chemosh, and they honestly would sacrifice children to this false God.

If you wonder what the God of Israel thought of Moab, in Psalm 60:8, He said, *Moab is my washbasin...*

In other words, this is where I wash my dirty feet. So, Elimelek took his family from Bethlehem, which means house of bread, to Moab, to a place that God had forbidden them.

Elimelek means my God is King, but he wasn't living like God was his King. Instead, he was doing what was right in his own eyes, just like so many people today.

Now, I don't want to be too hard on him, because there was a famine. He was probably thinking, if I go to Moab, there's going to be a better economy, I can get a better job, I can provide a better life for my family.

You can understand that, but I would just issue a gentle spiritual warning that may be for some of you.

I've noticed that when it comes to our families, we're often tempted to prioritize economic provision over spiritual protection.

In other words, if someone has a job offer somewhere else, and the job offer is for more money, most people just assume, that must be the place to go. And oftentimes, it is.

Sometimes it is the blessings of God to go and to have a better provision for your family. And so, you can be more generous. But sometimes, it's not.

I've seen many times people who are thriving spiritually, close to God, plugged into Christian community and an awesome church, go somewhere for a little more money and they get somewhere else, and they have more money and less God.

Be very careful not to always prioritize economics over the presence of God. So, things are a little tough in Bethlehem.

He leaves and goes to Moab, the sinful land of Moab, because times got tough in Bethlehem.

So, what do you do when times get tough? When times get tough, do you continue to trust and obey God in Bethlehem? Or do you leave and go to Moab?

What do you do when times get tough? Because most of you would say, I'm a Christian. Or you would say, my God is the King of my life. And so, I want to trust and obey His word.

And maybe you're dating. And His word says, we're not going to have sex until we're married. This is just reserved for the covenant of marriage.

So, I'm going to obey God. And then, you say, but I've been dating and waiting and I've got this deep desire for mating. I've got my needs. So, do you trust and obey God, or do you move to Moab?

My God is the King of my life, and therefore I will honor Him with what I have, and I will return to Him 10% of what He blesses me with in the form of the tithe that is not mine, but it belongs to Him.

And then, money gets tight, and that thing goes on sale, and you want to buy it. Do you trust and obey God, or do you move to Moab?

My God is the King of my life. I'm a Christian. And so, I'm going to stop getting drunk. And I stop getting drunk, and then I have a really bad day, and I'm really stressed out.

So, do you trust and obey God, or do you move to Moab? Because I'll shoot straight with you and it's true for me too.

WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH, MOAB LOOKS TEMPTING.

He's worried about his family. And so, he does what feels right in his own eyes. Honestly, most of us have gone to Moab under far less pressure.

My God is King of my life. But sometimes we do what's right in our own eyes. So, what happened? They left Bethlehem, they went to Moab, and everything worked out fine. They did what they wanted.

They trusted their heart. And they lived their own truth. And everything worked out just as they had hoped.

Scripture says this in Ruth 1:3. *³Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years,*

⁵both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Heartbreak. First, her husband, Elimelek, dies. And we don't know what happened. But what we do know is this left her in a really bad place.

Who remembers how far apart these places are? About 50 miles, about a day's walk, maybe two days if you're stopping for some Waffle House and staying the night at Motel 6 or whatever.

It is not a long walk, and yet, she stayed there for 10 years. And because she was away from God's people, her sons married women who were not God's people. They married Moabite women.

Now, I want to give the boys a benefit of the doubt, because these girls were probably really cute and probably had a really good personality and they probably thought, I can convert them.

Because that's what many of you're doing right now.

They're really cute and they got a really good personality. And this one's got a job. The last one didn't even have a job. And so, I can convert them.

And yet in God's love for us, He actually gives us very loving boundaries.

And so, many people ask me, "Hey, Joe, is it okay if I'm a Christian and I marry someone that's not a Christian?" And the answer is, according to scripture, it's not okay.

The Bible says in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 6, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers...*

And admittedly, that limits your playing field. Why is God so restrictive? Why is He trying to spoil your fun? He's not trying to spoil your fun. He's actually loving you.

And I would ask you this, if God is the King of your life, why would you want to spend your life and raise your kids with someone who doesn't see Him as their King?

He's so cute, but he is not a Christian. One day your kid's going to get sick, and he can't pray for your kids.

Why did they leave Bethlehem? They left so they wouldn't die. And what happened when they did what was right in their own eyes, three of them actually died.

You now have three widows with no homes, no money, no hope, and finally, Naomi, the mother, decides to return to Bethlehem.

Along the way, they have this conversation. And Naomi tells her daughters-in-law, **"Go back to your home, marry your own people, have babies."** And Orpah does that. But Ruth decides to stay. And she speaks for the first time in the story in verse 16.

¹⁶But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

She declares this fierce loyalty to her mother-in-law. Then, and the most important part of the verse is not loyalty to a person, but a declaration of dependence on God. I'll no longer worship Chemosh. Now, I will worship the God of Israel.

And she makes this dedication that this is her salvation. What did she do? What happened? Ruth and Naomi, essentially they did this. They left Moab and they returned to Bethlehem.

This is a picture of what the Bible calls in the New Testament, repentance.

Re means to turn, pent is the highest, is to return from the lower place of Moab to the higher calling of Bethlehem. It's to turn away from where you were and to go back to...

Now, what's interesting, in order to turn to Bethlehem, you have to turn your back to Moab. To go to where God wants you to be, you must leave where you are. This highlights one of the most important truths, and that is this.

TO GET TO THE RIGHT PLACE, YOU HAVE TO LEAVE THE WRONG ONE.

To get to where God wants you to be, you must walk away from a place that is not His will. I could say it this way. If you're dating someone who is not honoring you or honoring God, to marry the right person, you have to dump the wrong one.

To get to the right place, you have to leave the wrong one. And what's amazing is she made one decision to turn her back on Moab and to go to the God of Bethlehem.

And this one decision, this one act of repentance, this one choice changed her life, and it changed her legacy.

And it even changed the course of the entire world. It did. Because have you ever heard of Bethlehem before? What does Bethlehem mean? It means the house of bread, and Jesus, the bread of life, was born in Bethlehem.

Jesus was a descendant of a sinful Moabite woman who left Moab and went to Bethlehem. This is how amazing God is.

Through a woman who worshiped a false God. We're going to see in the upcoming chapters, through one decision, the living water, the bread of life, the Prince of Peace, the good shepherd, the Lord of all Lords and King of all Kings, the alpha and the omega, is born.

One moment of repentance, one single decision.

So, what does this mean for you? Be very open to what the Holy Spirit might show you. I wonder if there is some part of your life that is still in Moab.

Is there some part of your life still in Moab? Is there some area of your life where you're saying, my God is King, and yet you're doing what's right in your own eyes?

Is there some area of your life where you're claiming, **"Yes, I am a follower of Jesus,"** and yet you're following your own truth and not His truth?

Speak to us, God. Show us, God. Convict us, God. Lead us, God. Lead us in the way of everlasting.

So, the application question is,

WHAT ONE DECISION COULD YOU MAKE; WHAT ONE ACTION CAN YOU TAKE THAT WOULD CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR LIFE AND LEGACY?

What one action could you take to leave Moab and return to Bethlehem?

Some of you could cut up your credit cards and change your life.

Others could be the first to apologize.

Some of you could break up and move out. Don't settle for somebody who's worshipping the false God, because you want someone who worships the King of Kings.

Some of you could block that person from your phone or you could stop following the one that's bringing you down.

Some of you could confess your addiction and ask for help.

Some of you, you could live on less and give a lot more. But one decision, one action.

Some of you could surrender something to God.

Others of you could surrender someone to God.

Many of you could fall on your knees in broken repentance and surrender to Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of lords.

To get to the right place, you have to leave the wrong place. It's all about the re. Somebody say, **"It's all about the re."**

Over 1,100 times in the Bible, the word **shuv** is used. **Shuv** means to re return. It's all about the re. You just return to God. You leave Moab, you return to Bethlehem.

When you rebuke the enemy and return to God by repenting of your sins and receiving Christ, your spirit will be reborn, your mind renewed, your life rebuilt, and you'll be reconciled by Christ-redeeming work.

And while you rejoice, you'll reap the rewards of relationship, causing revival to break free in your life.

God is working. His grace is ready for you. Leave where you've been and go to where He wants you to be. One decision, one moment, one choice can change the trajectory of your life!

THE END