



Title: The Hand of the Lord (Ruth series)

Text: Ruth 1:1-22

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1:1 In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, 5 and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Decade of Despair

- **Days when the Judges ruled.** This was a time when “everyone did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25).
- **Famine in the land.** This brought with it extreme hardship and vulnerability. In the OT, famine often followed covenant unfaithfulness and was a wake up call to repent.
- **Bethlehem.** Ironically, Elimelech was from Bethlehem which meant “the house of bread.”
- **Moab.** A consistent enemy of God’s people Israel in the OT. The Moabites began as a result of Lot’s incestuous relationship with his daughter in Genesis 19. Numbers 22-25 recounts some of the debauchery of the Moabites in their dealings with Israel.
- **The woman was left without her two sons and her husband.** The text goes from mentioned Naomi’s name to calling her “the woman.” Literary device to communicate the depth of Naomi’s despair and vulnerability. Her very identity was at stake as she has lost everything and is now saddled with two barren Moabite daughters-in-law.

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” 14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

1. Bitterness blinds us.

- Causes us to be self-absorbed and make it all about us.
- We miss opportunities to make much of God.
- Shrinks our view of God.
 - To a mean-spirited God who deals in karma.
 - To a mere tribal deity who is just another option compared to Ruth's gods.

2. Faith frees us.

- Suffering actually served to ready Ruth to receive gifts of repentance (leave Moab) and faith (go to the God of Israel).
 - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- Her radical, risk-taking faith freed her from her past, her family, her false gods, security.
- God's free grace was the ultimate reason why Ruth believed.

3. God is both Sovereign and Good.

- Suffering often leads us to questions God's goodness and there are four possible answers:
 1. Sovereign but not good (Naomi's view)
 2. Good but not Sovereign (much of American Christianity)
 3. Neither
 4. He is both Sovereign and good (Biblical)
- Belgic Confession—the Doctrine of God's Providence (see attached)
- Ephesians 1:11-23
- For every one thing we can see He is doing countless unseen things for our good.
- Why does God even enter into a relationship with us?
 - For temporal good things or to give us the gift of Himself?
 - He sometimes weans us from our dependence on comfort to detach our hands from this world.
- William Cowper's poem: God Works in a Mysterious Way (see attached)

Belgic Confession – Article 13: the Doctrine of God’s Providence

We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what he does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ's disciples, so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word, without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures under his control, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father.

In this thought we rest, knowing that he holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without his permission and will.

For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God involves himself in nothing and leaves everything to chance.

God Moves in a Mysterious Way by William Cowper

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.