



<b>Series:</b> Ruth: A Pearl on the Dark Pages of History	<b>Reference:</b> Ruth Chapter 1	<b>Title:</b> Rich, Strong & Aromatic	<b>Date:</b> 9.3.17
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
The Book of Ruth is a great love story of faith by a woman who belonged before she believed. Let's look how her faith was rich strong & aromatic; a model even though her ancestry didn't fit the part of Jewish culture of the day.			

## Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

**UPG Prayer of the Day...** (Replaced by featuring some fun facts of Adam & Vinny to gear up for CG's)

### Sermon...

You may've heard the story of the girl who approached her father about how difficult life was. Her father, being a chef, took her to the kitchen & began boiling three pots of water. In one he placed a carrot, in another, an egg & in the last, a handful of coffee beans. After they'd boiled for a while he placed the carrot & egg on a plate & poured the water from the pot with the coffee beans in a glass. He had her taste all three then asked what her observations were. The carrot had gone soft, the egg had grown hard & the water with the coffee beans was rich, strong & aromatic. He then pointed out, all three had been in the same situation, boiling water, but yielded different results. He then asked, "In the trials you face in life, will you grow soft, become hard, or grow rich, strong & aromatic?"

Today we begin a short series on Ruth. **Not Ruth Bader Ginsberg, or Dr. Ruth, but Ruth of the Bible. A story which stands out like a pearl on the dark pages of Israel's history. A book which teaches us to walk in faith even in the darkest of times. And today I'd like you to be thinking about who you'd be in this story...**

**Only two books in the Hebrew Scriptures bear the name of women; Esther & Ruth. Esther was a Hebrew woman who married a Gentile King. Ruth was a Gentile woman who married a Hebrew man. A Gentile woman so honored, her name graces one of the most beautiful love stories in all of Scripture. A story read every year at the Feast of Pentecost by Orthodox Jews. She's even listed as one of the four non-Israelite women in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1 along with Tamar, Rahab, & Bathsheba. She's the great grandmother to King David, in direct lineage to the birth of Christ. Rahab, Boaz's mother, was a prostitute. Tamar, seduced her father-in-law to get her rightful inheritance. All four were foreigners from outside the nation of Israel, revealing the Kingdom of God is open to all people & all nations no matter our past or stage in life.**

**The story takes place in the time of the Judges. A dark time in the pages of Israel's history where they spiraled downward in their relationship to God. With each judge there had been a spike of renewal, but then they'd drop away once again. The book of Judges ends with the phrase, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." But Ruth's like a pearl set in contrast on the dark pages of this history. It tells us, even in the worst of times there remains goodness, love, honor & righteousness in**



some. Not only do we find Israelites acting in a godly manner here, but Ruth herself, a foreigner, stands in contrast to her Moabite ancestry teaching us deep faith lessons.

*Let's tell the story: 1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife & two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon & Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab & lived there.*

Life was hard; some say God had brought famine on the Promised Land as a result of Israel's sin. This family planned on staying for a while in Moab about 50 miles east & on the other side of the Dead Sea. Interestingly enough the wording changes from 'live for a while' to 'live' which is significant since it reveals they settled in. Were they acting in faith? There's no indication they sought God on this decision. So, were they waiting on God? Should they have stayed put? Possibly, but it's clear their intention was to escape a hardship instead of face it, perhaps reacting more in fear than in faith. Some would say this brought greater hardship on themselves & provides us with a backdrop of God's providence. They went from the attitude of escaping 'for a while' to 'settling' & they lived there for another ten years, Moab had become home. At first Naomi's husband passes away. Then it tells us more...

*3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah & the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon & Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons & her husband.*

All male security's taken from Naomi & her daughters-in-law as well as any inheritance in a male dominated society. No government intervention, no income, regarded as less than second class citizens. Naomi's under pressure in a foreign land, a foreign religion surrounds her, with little to no means for survival among basic enemies, the Moabites....but who were they?

You'd have to go back to Genesis 19 to find that out in the story of Lots two daughters who got him drunk & slept with him producing two sons; Moab & Ben-Ammi. These two sons were the birth of two nations, the Moabites & the Ammonites which is a good image of how far your personal sin can go (and in contrast, the book of Ruth is a good image of how far the purity & faith of a few can go). The Jews historically had a problem with adopting the idolatry of other nations like the Canaanite deity Baal. The Ammonites worship Molech & Ashtoreth; two gods who demanded child sacrifice & sexual perversion as acts of worship. The god of the Moabites, Chemosh, was not much different. These were two nations who constantly warred against Israel. So, Naomi found herself in a very precarious situation & needed to make a move.

*6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi & her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living & set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.*

She made the move back to Bethlehem, to her people & her God. At first, it seems she intended to do this with her daughters-in-law. But has second thoughts, urging the girls to go back to Moab & their former life, possibly out of despair, but three times she pleads with them. Orpah makes her decision after the second request.

*8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead & to me. 9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them & they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."*

*11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me - even if I had a husband tonight & then gave birth to sons - 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"*

*14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. 15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people & her gods. Go back with her."*

Three women in dire straights. Regarding these two girls, Jewish law gave provision for a Kinsman-Redeemer if a husband were to die. *Dueteronomy 25:5-6* states, if a Hebrew man died, his brother was to take the dead brother's wife as his own, becoming her Kinsman-Redeemer. The first born male from this second marriage would take the dead brothers name & recover all inheritance for the women & children. Women just didn't get inheritance, it'd be lost if there wasn't a Kinsman-Redeemer in the family. In this case there wasn't; these women had no legal recourse to get their inheritance & no security through a Kinsman Redeemer. Naomi's request is almost noble in a sense, she urges them to find security in their home land, with their people & with their gods.

Orpah makes that choice. It almost makes sense to urge them this way. But in her despair Naomi isn't thinking what's spiritually best for them. She isn't trusting God by leading these girls towards Him, rather away! How many times do we do that in our despair? How many times do we respond to life like a soft wet carrot? How many times do we look at the situation instead of God & cave? How many times do we lead others away from God because we're not viewing life through eyes of faith? God's blessing his people once again back in the Promised Land; He alone is their ultimate security. Their sustenance. That's where Naomi *needs* to lead them, not only home to physical sustenance, but to the one true God & spiritual sustenance.

Naomi *should* be the strong one; the Israelite familiar with God's faithfulness. But we can't be too hard on Naomi. Her intentions are good & few of us have endured such hardship. I'd probably react the same way. Conversely we find in Ruth a person of devotion & risky faith; the Moabite who only knows the God of Israel via marriage...

*16 But 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 & your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal*



*with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you & me." 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.*

*19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"*

*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."*

*22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.*

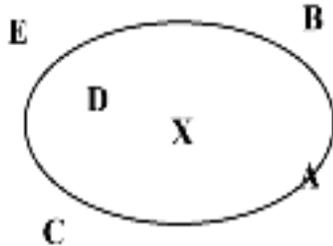
They return at harvest-time symbolizing a new beginning & Naomi's despair culminates in her desire to change her name from 'pleasant' (Naomi) to 'bitter' (Mara). Ruth on the other hand could change her name to coffee; she's rich, strong & aromatic. A non-Israelite marrying into a Jewish family would be required to convert, but it probably wouldn't have been a heartfelt conversion. However, when her husband died, a woman had the right to choose to stay within the nation of Israel, or to revert to her former belief system. This is a great image of a non-believer *belonging before believing* – Ruth may have been married into the faith probably not by heart conversion, but having belonged, her heart grows to trust God. Ruth responds with loving-kindness; a deep commitment & care towards Naomi; and the text uses the word 'clung' - the same word used to describe a husband leaving his family & clinging to his wife.

She's committed to this new faith community & following it's God like a believer - a stark contrast to her Moabite ancestry breaking all ties & affiliation by saying she'll make Naomi's people her people & Naomi's God her God. This is a book of seeking & contrasts. We've seen Naomi's reaction, a Hebrew who should know of God's faithfulness, but chooses despair (like many of us often do, despite our rich history). Compared to Ruth, a foreigner, an enemy of God's people, of different beliefs & who's lost all security in a male dominated world, choosing hope in an unfamiliar God. Ruth chooses risk instead of comfort in a foreign land & people above her own, the God of Israel, above the god of the Moabites.

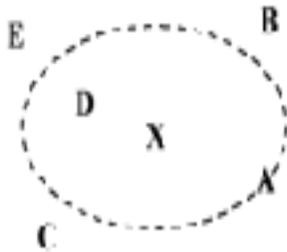
Imagine being her looking out to the future. How dark & foreboding it'd be, leaving security & stepping out in faith! Sometimes the Church encounters people like Ruth & inadvertently pushes them away! Treating them as outsiders, not realizing God's calling them to be a follower. We may not verbally do this, but we put cultural roadblocks up nonetheless. We need to erase the lines of outsider vs insider & learn to live in tension. And we can do that by understanding some ways in which we think.

The Church's often gotten stuck in the trap of **Boundary Thinking** which only asks are people in or out? Christian or non-Christian? It looks like this...if X represents Jesus, we're very comfortable D is in & even that E, B, C are out (we at least know where they stand), but we're confused about A who seems to be on the line. And typically we scare the A's away by demanding a decision of faith from the outset which is much more about our comfort than what they need. We require they conform to the community before

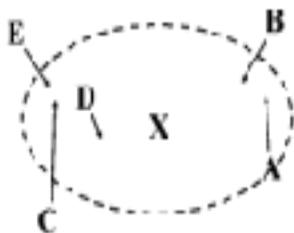
they even have a chance of meeting Jesus - we require they *believe* before they *belong*. The Church sometimes has focused too much on outside behavior & conformity rather than listening to where a person is in their faith journey. We need to become comfortable living in tension, allowing another to soak in the boiling water of life for a while until they become rich, strong & aromatic in faith! (Steve Smallman - *Spiritual Birthline*)



We could however erase that line a bit & bring ourselves to what's called **Centered Thinking** which gets rid of the boundary, and by doing so we place more of our focus on Jesus. Here we deemphasize 'in or out', becoming more aware of how close D is to the center & we make some interesting distinctions – such as, outsider C may be as close to the center as *almost* insider A.



**Process Thinking** takes this further further. Now let the arrows suggest direction & by their length, speed or momentum, two factors which are invisible in the other ways of thinking. Now it becomes clear that B & E are better off than A, even though they're outsiders by boundary thinking & distant by centered thinking. In other words, is someone closer to, or farther from Jesus? Wheat grows up with the chaff - there are people in the church who've embraced the subculture of it, but not Jesus. Using it for their own means of safety & control instead of living in the tension of faith with Christ.



**Journey Thinking** takes it even further. In Journey thinking we realize the center point isn't static. Jesus is moving, progressing, advancing & journeying (notice I didn't say He's changing - God doesn't change, but he's doing something). Now the most important question becomes whether one is FOLLOWING. Somehow, this should

resonate with Jesus' call to FOLLOW ME. *Now*, who in this diagram would you rather be? If X is Jesus, who's traveling with Jesus? Who has responded to the call, Follow ME?



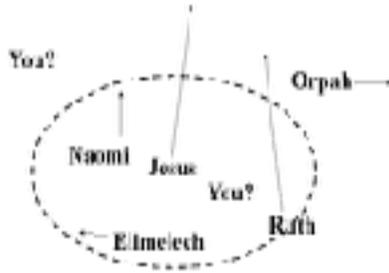
Journey thinking is much more true of life, helping us to understand Jesus words when he says, *“Many of the last will be first”* & *“Do not judge”*. In boundary thinking what was meant for us as a starting line became a finishing line. In boundary thinking we get across the in/out line & park there - but Jesus didn't call us to a parking lot, rather a journey of faith lived in risk & tension.

Ruth's become coffee, rich, aromatic & strong! She's 'Point A', an insider disguised as an outsider who's journeying towards God in quiet faith, maybe a faith she doesn't even realize she has yet; putting faith into action, not shying away. What would've been the result if Naomi was successful in sending her back just because she wasn't culturally Jewish. What if we cut people off from access to Jesus because they didn't culturally fit?

We recognize in hindsight God's call on Ruth. In His providential way He's calling her to himself. She has few, if any answers, but follows. Who can resist the call of God? Not one of us. We love because God first loved us. Awoken from spiritual death, infused with his Spirit; the old has gone, the new has come. So many times we view people as being in or out, but how do we really know who's a true follower? Are you? We need to live in the tension of the perceived dichotomy of the assurance of salvation while walking it out with mature fear & trembling bringing a humility towards others knowing we're no better than anyone else.

Remember Jesus said concerning the day of Judgement in Mt 7:21-23, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

A follower might be the person who outwardly doesn't necessarily reflect what you think a Christian should look like? Sometimes it's not those inside the church who are on a true spiritual journey, just following a set of rules. Many times we boil this relationship with God down to 'do's & don'ts', parking ourselves in the lot of morality & at best driving in circles. If I park, I feel safe, if I just don't move I won't make a mistake - but God's looking for risk taking Kingdom builders. The mistakes don't matter as much when the heart's on a willing journey with Him. Many times the Church's filled with limp carrots & hard-boiled eggs when God intends rich aromatic coffee.



God's in charge, moving even in the worst of situations! So who are you in this story? Are you Elimelech running from a bad situation only to make things worse? Or, Naomi who lets her life circumstances dictate her outlook, losing joy? Orpah running back to the comfort of the familiar even when it didn't work & was harmful? Or Ruth, a bit different, an 'outsider', a bit of a mess, but the one allowing the coffee to infuse rich aromatic strong flavors of faith in the waters of your life? You can belong before you believe, you're welcome here even if all this doesn't make sense yet. Jesus will grow on you, ripen in your heart producing a rich strong aromatic faith over time. Trust Him.

Who will you model, how will you live? Become soft & weak, grow hardened in your heart, or let your situation bring out a rich, strong, aromatic faith? Following Jesus as he moves forward! It's not our business who's 'in or out', what matters is we're following Jesus, not shutting others out from the faith journey. If Naomi had been successful in turning Ruth back to Moab & her former life just because she wasn't culturally Jewish, we'd never have this great love story of faith to explore! Some of you are still soaking, great. Some of you know someone who is, and need to invite them on the journey back to Jesus, how can you be a good disciple allowing someone to belong before they believe?

### **BENEDICTION:**

Part of following Jesus is to engage deeply with the people of God. Community Groups are probably one of the best ways in which that happens - so I urge you to get connected next week as they kick off. Let's hit the ground running!

I challenge you guys - who around you is on a spiritual journey even if they don't look the part. That's the person you should be inviting to your Community Group. All are welcome, there are no boundaries to come share & learn about Jesus. So, in the coming weeks, let's be prayerful & mindful about building these groups by being invitational to all around us to join in. I hope that each time you meet, you keep an open chair in the room & pray it's filled by those in your lives who may be experiencing God's call but not even aware of it yet. No boundaries, just people following Jesus!