

When a young woman without a home or future followed in the footsteps of faith to return to the harvest fields of a kinsman-redeemer, she found her life transformed. Like her, God calls us to the mighty provisions of our own Redeemer and learn how to harvest a future satiated and satisfied with God's best.

Return, Growth, Transformation and Maturity in the Harvest Fields of the Lord.

(a study of the book of Ruth)

A. Ruth – Historical Background and Significance.

- Set in the time of the judges between 1046 and 1035 BC.
- Author: unknown (*Thought to be Samuel but can't be because Samuel died before David's coronation – 4:17, 22*)
- Story of a Gentile woman, Ruth (a Moabite), who marries a Hebrew husband (Boaz) – to typify the gentiles coming into the promise of Christ.
- Purpose (historically): To show a gentile woman became a descendant of Christ. (Boaz – Obed – Jesse – David).
- Key word: “**Kinsman-Redeemer**” (*A type of Christ who, when he fulfills his divinely ordained function, truly liberates a soul and brings them into His full inheritance*).

B. A Story Told in the Harvest Fields of Boaz, the Redeemer.

- The **setting** is the harvest fields: a picture of the soul in Christ. The soil our heart; the crops the content of Christ!
- Boaz is a type of Christ: He owns the fields, the seeds, the harvest... all the prosperity is His to give.
- The mix of the lesson of Ruth: a story of Love that finds an inheritance in the Harvest field of Boaz.

C. A Refreshing Story of Love in a time of negative history.

- Ruth is like a refreshing shower or bath after the contamination of the book of Judges.

- **Judges** is a book of repeated defeat, lowered standards, shame and disgrace; **Ruth** is a book of unusual loyalty, uncommon love and unexpected personal commitment.
- “Ruth” means “Companionship”, “Friendship”, “Intimate association”
- In **Judges** people rise up and fall away from God over and over in a repeated cycle of disloyalty; In **Ruth** we see a faithful and loyal love that grows deep and matures and is rewarded with unimaginable harvest blessings.

D. Ruth is also an Allegory of the soul's journey to return to God's House, finding redemption, marriage to Christ and the harvest of His full blessings.

- Ruth being taken in to marry Boaz is a type of the Gentile believers coming to be taken into Christ and inheriting His place in God's house.
- It is a story of a poor spirit inheriting and harvesting the fullness of the kingdom of God
- Matt 5:3

E. Spiritual Maturity is marked by a turning of our love towards God in four stages.

- Ruth neatly divides into four distinct settings:
 - 1.) *Country of Moab (ch. 1) RETURN*
 - 2.) *A field in Bethlehem (ch. 2) GROWTH*
 - 3.) *The threshing floor in Bethlehem (ch. 3) TRANSFORMATION*
 - 4.) *The city of Bethlehem (ch. 4) MATURITY*
- These four locations proximate the souls journey from prodigal wanderings in the world (Moab), to entering the life of Christ (field), to intimacy with Christ (threshing floor) and Union with Him in New Jerusalem (City).
- We are going to look at these four stages as stages of our love for God growing into maturity: 1) Initial Love, 2) Growing love, 3) Transforming Love, 4) Maturing Love.

F. Do you want to Grow? It is a matter of how much of Christ you take in, how much of Him you “Harvest”.

- Ruth teaches us:

1. Get in the right environment:
2. Take in the right content
3. Have the right relationship
4. Receive the right grace

G. *The missing ingredient to growth in the church today is LOVE for God.*

- We have the knowledge, but our love has not kept up with the level of our revelation. (*Ruth is the story that addresses this problem*).
- The summery of the spiritual life:
 - 1.) Know the Truth.
 - 2.) Love the Truth you know.
 - 3.) Live by the measure of that Love.

MESSGE ONE:

Return to the Harvest Fields

(The principle of repentance and rest)

Ruth 1:22 (NIV) *22* So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem **as the barley harvest was beginning.**

P.P.: Ruth 1:1-22; Deut 4:30; Jer 3:22; Isaiah 55:7; Hosea 3:5; 1 Thess 5:9

A. Ruth is led by Naomi to RETURN to Bethlehem during the barley harvest.

- “Return to Me” – would summarize the whole Old Testament in three words.
- ‘Religion’ = “to return”

B. The One Remedy for all our ills: RETURN!

- **Deuteronomy 4:30 (NIV)** *When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him.*
- **Isaiah 55:7 (NIV)** *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*
- **Jeremiah 3:22 (NIV)** *“Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding.” “Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.*
- **Hosea 3:5 (NIV)** *Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NIV)** *“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

C. Returning is about getting our soul in the right ENVIRONMENT.

D. Chapter One is about the LEADING of God: to stop our wanderings and make a full return to the “fields” of Christ as our supply.

Message in a Nutshell...

Ground:

Spiritual Growth requires the right environment...

Path:

When our heart wanders from God, repentance and faith will bring it back...

Fruition:

Placing it in Christ as the optimum growing environment.

1. Harboring a prodigal heart – spending our days in restless wanderings.

(Faltering Love)

Ruth 1:1-5

- A. When there is Failure and Famine in God's House (v.1a)
"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land..."
- When there is a famine of God's House, saints wander back to the world.
 - When God rules there is prosperity for all. When man rules, there is famine...
- B. The Results of Famine = leaving God's House for restless wanderings in Moab (v.1b)
"...and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab."
- Taking the family away from God and into the world... the results are inevitable....
- C. When we turn from faith we slip into a barren experience (v.2)
"The man's name was Elimelech ("king"), his wife's name Naomi ("pleasant"), and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites ("fruitful") from Bethlehem ("House of Bread"), Judah ("Praise"). And they went to Moab and lived there."
- D. From famine to death – The results of our prodigal wanderings from God (v.3).

"Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons."

- E. Becoming "worn" and "weak" by our wanderings (v.2)
"... and the names of his two sons were Mahlon ("Worn") and Kilion ("Weak")"
- F. God brings in the hope of His LEADING (v.4). {Orpha = "freshness"; Ruth = "Companion, friendship"}
"They married Moabite women, one named Orpah ("Freshness") and the other Ruth ("Companionship")."
- G. The Deepening attacks of "The Lord of Death" (v. 5)
"After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband."
- **Summery:** We see the awful cost to our spiritual life when we wander away from God's House and from faith because conditions in the church life are not what they should be.
 - We either stay in God's fields and Harvest Christ or we will wander into the world and satan will harvest our life for death and destruction.

2. Hearing the Lord's call and awakening slumbering faith.

(Awaking Love)

Ruth 1:6-10

A. Hearing of the Goodness of the LORD (v.6)

"When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them..."

- Faith rises at the point of hearing that the Lord is good.
- There is always HARVEST time in God's fields.
- Get into your spirit: God's provision is there!

B. Prepare the heart to return and leave the place it's in (v.6b).

"Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there."

- It takes a prepared heart to take the journey. Many hearts are not adequately prepared and so never leave.

C. Setting out on the road of faith that leads home to the land of Praise (v.7).

"With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah."

- **Isaiah 35:8 (NIV)** ⁸And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.
- **Isaiah 40:3 - 4 (NIV)** ³A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the

wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

D. Returning to the Lord with "Freshness" (Orpha) and "Companionship" (Ruth) of the Spirit (v.7).

"With her two daughters-in-law..."

- The Holy Spirit has been sent as our Comforter: Our helper, called-along-side to help
- The Spirit of the Lord is our freshness and our companionship. Without these we will not make the journey out of Moab to the fields of the Lord.

E. A cry for rest in the home of a Husband (v. 9).

"May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

- This is Naomi's own cry for herself. This desire is being impressed upon Ruth.
- Christ is our "another husband" – the one our souls need to be married to.

Summary: The starting place of returning to the Lord in spiritual growth is faith. Faith is gained by hearing His word so our spirit is awakened and strengthened to pursue Him. The Holy Spirit is our companion for the journey homeward. The WORD and the SPIRIT will take us home to the fields of the Lord's provision.

3. Having an honest assessment of our condition and making a full consecration.

(Devoted Love)

Ruth 1:11-18

A. An honest assessment of the damage our wanderings have cost us (v.11-13).

"Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹²... 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 and then gave birth to sons—¹³would 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!"

- Barren, old, no Hope, bitter, everything against me.
- Is your image of God coloured by your bitter experiences?
- Is God coloured viewed through revelation or your experiences?

B. Clinging by faith to the hope set before us (v.14)

"Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her"

- Ruth's clinging to Naomi is a beautiful picture lesson of what faith is and does: it stays upon Christ. (If you picture Ruth being us, Naomi our spirit and the trip to Bethlehem as a return to God you will see the beauty of this verse).
- Heb 6:18

C. Coming to a quality decision: "I will not leave or turn back... ever!" (Coming to full surrender and full consecration) (v.16-17)

'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 and your God my God. ¹⁷Where 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 and me.'"

D. Going and staying with God and God's people in the church life (v.16).

'Your people will be my people and your God my God.'

E. No separation: The faithful vision of a returning soul (v.17).

'May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.'

F. Are you "determined" – Only this resolve will end the urging of the enemy to return to Moab (v.18).

'When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.'

- **Summary:** God leads us to Repentance and Faith so that we can advance spiritually. Both will lead us to a full surrender and consecration of ourselves to the vision of following the Spirit to making a full return to Christ.

4. Returning to God's House and his rich supply.

(Supported Love)

Ruth 1:19-22

A. A return to the Lord's "House of Bread" to feed our spirit (v.19a).

"So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem."

- Bethlehem is "the House of Bread" = it is the true church life where Christ is feeding His flock with Himself so that we grow up strong and fruitful in His image.

B. Our own private cheering section: The support of the body of Christ when prodigals return home (v.19b).

"When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them..."

- Acts 20:32, Rom 15:2, 1 Thess 5:11, 1 Thes 3:2-3, 1 Thes 5:14, Heb 10:25, Phil 2:1-2

C. Sin has taken its toll – a shadow of our former self (v.19c).

"...and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

D. Making an honest and full evaluation of our inward condition (v.20-21). (Repentance)

²⁰*"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹I 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."*

E. Returning at the time of the Barley Celebration: Christ is Resurrection life (v.22).

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

- Barley is a type of Christ in Resurrection Life. (*Barley ripens first and is part of the firstfruits offering -- Lev.23:10*)
- The "BEGINNING" of new and better things in our life always starts with being in God's "harvest fields" of resurrection. There He brings His things to life in us... in the place of death He brings forth life!
- **Summary:** Growth is about returning to the right environment where we are fed with Christ and experience His resurrection life. Practically, this means being in a local church that has a true Ministry of Christ to the believers.

CONCLUSION

What do we learn about growth in the first chapter of Ruth?

- ✓ The church life can be in a poor condition tempting us to leave.
- ✓ When we turn from God's house and quit feeding on His word we wander and diminish over time.
- ✓ Death and spiritual famine take its toll on us. (Things are no longer pleasant (Naomi) but bitter (Mara))
- ✓ God is always seeking to return us to Himself by His wonderful leadings and the arrangement of our circumstances.
- ✓ Faith is always the starting point of growing in Christ. Faith comes from hearing God's word.
- ✓ To return to God we need to make a full consecration to Him pursue Him with a full heart.

- ✓ We have to make a quality decision to stick with our spirit and follow it home to God.
- ✓ We will need to make a full assessment of our inward condition. Repentance and faith must always go together to clear up our inward condition.
- ✓ The true body of Christ will always be a safe environment to be supported and encouraged in your full return.
- ✓ The true church is a continual land of resurrection life found in Christ.