

Pentecost 21
“God Brings Triumph Out Of Tragedy”
Ruth 1:1-19

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

When God presents you with a new gift, a new opportunity, a new direction, are you more likely to be cautious about it, or are you more like to gobble up the new opportunity with enthusiasm?

Take a look at this cute video clip...

2 questions: 1. Have any of you gone to a restaurant drive-thru in order to buy your pet an ice cream cone?

2. In life, do you tend to be cautious with what God gives you (lick around the edges)? Or do you gobble it up, bold, totally committed, all in. This is Ruth.

The story of Ruth is a beautiful story, it’s a story where we see **God bring triumph out of tragedy**. WE see in this story that, despite all of the pain and hardship she has experienced, she is totally committed to the Lord and to Naomi, her mother-in-law.

Let’s take a look at this story where once again, God brings triumph out of tragedy.

Elimelech and Naomi have 2 sons. They live in Bethlehem. But God’s people had disobeyed God. To the point that the Bible says that at that time, **“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**

Way back then, the world struggled with rampant immorality, moral relativism, unconstrained sin. Most heinous, God’s people were worship other gods. And God punished the nation of Israel, and He allowed a famine to come upon the land. (God does not always tell us WHY challenges come into our life, but in this case He does. His people were worshipping other gods.) Very soon, there was no food. This is a real crisis. This is life and death. Elimelech and his family were hungry.

Let me share 3 mistakes that Elimelech made in dealing with this crisis.

First mistake, he and Naomi decided to leave Bethlehem and move to Moab. Moab was an enemy of Israel. The people of Moab worship pagan gods. God said that His people should have nothing to do with Moab. Elimelech and Naomi were believers, believers in the one true God. But they must have thought that being hungry was reason enough to disobey God and go live among the enemies of the Lord.

That is still a common temptation today. We sometimes feel that as long as I have a good reason for what I'm doing, then God won't mind if I disobey Him. Maybe God won't notice if I disobey His command. But He does notice.

Second mistake, Elimelech brought his 2 sons into the midst of a pagan land. He **didn't just put himself** in this immoral environment, he brought his sons there too. And Elimelech allowed his sons to marry pagan women who would already be worshiping their own false gods. Once again, God had forbidden His people from intermarrying with the Canaanites, lest they be enticed to worship false gods also.

Third mistake is that Elimelech forgot that his #1 priority as father is to be the spiritual leader and role model in the home. Rather than demonstrating trust in God, he took matters into his own hands. Though well-intended (he WAS moving in order to try and find food) he failed to remind his family that God is always at work in our lives. God alone brings triumph from tragedy. Trust Him. Here was his chance to teach the family, "God has always taken care of us, and He always will."

Do you know what the name Elimelech means? "God is King of my life." He must have forgotten the meaning of his own name.

But thankfully, the story does not end here. You know, our God is so amazing, that even when we sin and disobey Him, He STILL loves us, HE STILL provides for us, and HE STILL brings good EVEN from the midst of our rebellion. That's what Romans 8 says, "**In ALL things God works for the good for those who love Him...**"

Or in Romans 5, God tells us to REJOICE in our suffering, because suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and Character produces hope. And Hope NEVER disappoints us.

Our God turns even tragedy into His triumph. And we see this beautifully displayed in Ruth. Elimelech dies, and 10 years later, his 2 sons also die. This leaves Mother-in-law Naomi, and her 2 daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. As widows, they would have nothing, ignored by the world, living in poverty. Naomi decides it is time to head back home, back to Bethlehem. She tells her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, and perhaps they will find another husband.

But Ruth was not going to allow Naomi to leave alone. Rather than being a poor spiritual influence on the family, Ruth had listened to Elimelech and Naomi talk about their God, and she came to faith in the one true God. She was all in. Whatever God allowed to happen, she was going to trust in Him and not be afraid. Her relationship with Naomi was

- Centered in her faith in God
- One where each tried to out-serve and out-love the other.

And God blessed Ruth's faithfulness. When they arrive back in Bethlehem, God led Ruth to a man named Boaz, who turns out was a close relative of Naomi, who would become her Kinsman redeemer, and who would marry Ruth and give her a home, hope, and a future.

But that's not all. Through her marriage to Boaz, she became the great-grandmother of King David, and a direct ancestor of Jesus – Jesus the Redeemer, who died on the cross and rose again to bring forgiveness and life, not just to the Jews in Israel, but to all people. God turned Tragedy to Triumph for all people

Ruth became a beacon in history, reminding all of us that God desires all people from every nation to be saved. Ruth became a model of commitment when she said, "Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God."

What love lessons can we learn from Ruth? What behaviors and choices will more likely lead to a triumphant family experience?

First, **Surrender to God's Sovereignty**. When you read through the very short book of Ruth, you will see God at work through every challenge. Even a famine, even the poor choice of moving to a pagan land was used by God to bring Ruth into the family tree of the Savior. Every difficulty, question, uncertainty, and broken heart was used by God to place Ruth into the Family Tree of Jesus Christ.

And in your lives, even when you are completely unaware as to WHY something is happening, there is no such thing as a coincidence. God directs and uses events in order to accomplish His purpose. Surrender to Him in faith and trust.

Second, **Never Forget to Cultivate Character**. Even though circumstances were so hard, Naomi continued to trust God and be an example to Ruth. Ruth demonstrated trust and loyalty to her family.

For all of us, to cultivate character means don't sell out, don't cave in, trust Him.

Third, **Receive the Redeemer**. Ruth heard about the one true God, and followed Him. She was all in. She was committed in faith.

No matter what your background, no matter what sins or grief or pain or poor choices might be in your life today, you need the Redeemer. We all need the Redeemer, who is Jesus. Jesus died, and on Easter He brought triumph out of tragedy.