
Entering In: (Ice breaker question)

How would you describe “hope” to someone who doesn’t understand this term?

The Context:

As we move through the Advent season, we will be looking at individuals from Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus that are examples of the characteristics of faith (Rahab), hope (Ruth), love (David), peace (Asa) and joy (Josiah).

This week we look at Ruth and Naomi. The period in which the events of recorded in the book of Ruth (the time in which the judges ruled) are among the worst in Israel’s history. Like the period of decline within the ancient Roman Empire, the Israelite nation began to crumble from within. The book of Judges repeatedly states that during this time “everyone did as he saw fit”. As each family or group fought for its rights alone, the society became fractured.

The book of Judges runs downhill, from bad to worse. The last five chapters contain some of the ugliest stories in the Bible – tales of idolatry, civil war, thievery, rape and murder. No enemy does all this: Israelites do it to each other. Clearly, the exalted nation of Israel, God’s chosen people, has lost its sense of direction. But in this same period is the book of Ruth, a refreshing story of hope and redemption.

Going Deeper

1. Hope: anticipation of the unseen ends of our faith.

Are you surprised by Ruth decision to stay with her mother-in-law? Why or why not?

NOTE: Moab was one of the nations that oppressed Israel during the period of the judges (Judges 3:12), so there was hostility between the two nations. Plus, there was almost nothing worse than being a widow in the ancient world. Widows were taken advantage of or ignored. They would equate to the homeless in American society. They were almost always poverty stricken.

Why do you think that even though Naomi was bringing Ruth home with her, she felt that she was coming home empty? What can we learn from her incorrect assumption?

Naomi said that God was against her. Was she right to think and feel this way? Why or why not? How should suffering affect a person's attitude toward God?

2. Hope depends upon the God in whom we believe.

A single woman had few ways to support herself in those days. She could beg, sell herself into slavery, become a prostitute, look for a husband among the eligible men of the village, or seek support from her nearest male relative. Or, during the months of harvest, she could glean. Consider the risks of gleaning and the alternatives facing Ruth and Naomi.

What do you learn about Ruth from her work in gleaning to support both herself and her mother-in-law?

What do you most admire about Boaz in chapter 2?

NOTE: The law of gleaning did not require the landowner to provide either food or water or protection from the men.

Think about the choices Boaz and the unnamed kinsman each make in 4:2-10. What do you learn about each man's priorities?

NOTE: At first the unnamed kinsman probably thought that he would only have to marry Naomi who was beyond childbearing years. Any male children that he would have fathered by Ruth would legally be considered the sons of Ruth's first husband. Thus the land would never pass into his own family's possession, and in fact he would reduce his estate by spending it to purchase the land. He would also need to assume financial responsibility for supporting Ruth, any children Ruth would bear, and Naomi.

3. Hope causes us to live anticipately

¹³ ***while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Titus 2:12***

Remember what Naomi thought God was doing in her life when she was empty of wealth, family, and status? What part did God play in filling her emptiness?

The book of Ruth tells how Naomi moves from emptiness at the beginning of the story to fullness at the end of the story, from poverty and sorrow to security and joy. The story is structured around her choice to find hope through the kind, selfless and God-blessed acts of Ruth and Boaz. The last verses of our story show that God's plan extended beyond Naomi's personal problems. God used Ruth and Boaz to produce Israel's greatest king. Their great-grandson turned out to be David. And many centuries later they also became the ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem.

Just as God brought fullness and hope to Naomi through the selfless work of Boaz expressed in his willingness to assume the role of family-redeemer, so also we are brought to fullness and hope through our family- Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ the Bible indicates that we, like Naomi in the beginning of the story, exist in a state of hopelessness. We all fall short of God's standard of absolute perfection and are therefore eternally separated from Him (Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1-3). However we can be brought to fullness and hope through the selfless and costly sacrifice of God's son, Jesus Christ (Mark 10:45; I Peter 1:18-19). In a small family circle in Bethlehem, God gives us a preview of how he will bring the bitterness of life on earth to an end.

Do you believe that God can change the bitterness of your hard experiences? Explain.

Are there ways that God has shown his faithfulness to you and changed your sorrow to joy?