

ViralStJames Bible Study #17: Facing Difficulties

The Background – Facing Difficulties

Ruth

To many people, the Old Testament is a closed book – what could be relevant to 21st century Britain in a story about people living over 2,000 years ago in a rural society in a foreign land? Except when you dig down into it, you find people wrestling with the same life issues that we face today. The Book of Ruth is about dealing with all the troubles life throws at you; about coping with tragedy; refugee status; and for those who have received much, about how we should use what we have been given. It deals with individuals, and yet sets out the importance of the support the wider community can offer. We are not in this alone. At the root of it all is a story about faith and how faith is demonstrated through action.

The Passage: Read the book of Ruth (it's a short story, only 4 chapters/pages long)

The Questions

- 1) Look first at the character of Ruth. Whilst it is understandable that Naomi, having lost both her husband and two sons, would return to her homeland where she still owned property, such a choice would not have been so obvious for Ruth. Can you think of the obstacles that would have faced Ruth in continuing on with Naomi?**
 - *She would have been a stranger, a foreigner, a refugee in a foreign land – no network of support to fall back on, no family or friends – all she knew was Naomi;*
 - *She had no income, no husband, no children to support her – so would have to start from the beginning;*
 - *She was putting herself in a position where she would have to help support her older mother in law.*

- 2) Why do you think Ruth makes the choice to accompany Naomi?**
 - *She trusts in God (1 v 16-17)*
 - *She resists the temptation to accept that it has all gone wrong, that it's time to throw in the towel, return home and abandon God – she clings on to hope;*
 - *She remains committed to Naomi as her family (1.17; 2.23)*
 - *She loves Naomi (4.v15)*

- 3) What does Ruth turn her hand to when she arrives in Bethlehem? What does she focus on?**
 - *She 'gleans' the harvest – picking up what has been left behind by the harvesters - she focuses on what she can do to support herself and her mother-in-law – even if it means joining the poor and depending on the generosity of others; (2. v 3-7)*
 - *She doesn't look back to her life in Moab, but concentrates on what opportunities there are in the present;*
 - *Is there an element here of Mathew 6 v 33-34 – trusting God and doing the right thing?*

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4) What do we learn about Ruth's attitude?

- *She isn't afraid to ask for help (2 v7)*
- *She is hardworking (2 v7)*
- *She is humble 2 v10, v13)*
- *She takes risks (leaving Moab; approaching Boaz when he was asleep and effectively asking him to marry her 3. v 9)*
- *She is obedient (3 v5)*
- *She is trusting – in the generosity of Boaz, in God*

5) What can we learn from Ruth and her actions?

6) If you have time, now turn to Boaz. Unlike Ruth and Naomi, he has stayed in Bethlehem, prospered and is a respected member of his community. Their lives have gone in different directions. What is his reaction when he finds a foreign refugee picking up the left overs on his land?

- *He is generous (2 v 15-16, 21)*
- *He respects her for her actions to support her mother in law (2 v 11-12)*
- *He treats someone worse off than him with honour (2 v 14-15)*
- *He looks out for her (2 15)*

7) What do you think inspires Boaz to act as he does?

- *Read Leviticus 19, v 9-10; 33-34. These laws were in place to help the Israelites reflect and demonstrate the love of God for the poor, the stranger – so they would stand out as beacons of light to the nations around them;*
- *Whilst Boaz was not a priest, he clearly saw the need to put God's teachings into action in his business and personal life (Do we?)*
- *His deeds reflected his words (2.v4)*

8) Is there an echo here of Matthew 25 v 34-40, and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (who is my neighbour?) Can you see the continuity between faith in action in Old Testament times and in the teachings of Jesus?

9) Boaz has been blessed with prosperity – but what is his attitude towards what he has?

- *Generosity – happy to let the poor glean (2 v 8)*
- *Shares his meal with Ruth (2 v 14)*
- *Gives Ruth six measures of barley for herself and Naomi (3.15)*
- *Note that his life is enriched by his generosity – he receives the blessing of a loyal and faithful wife – and a son who becomes King David's grandfather and part of the genealogy of Jesus is an ancestor of Jesus (Mathew chapter 1)*
- *He cares more about people than profits – but in giving he receives.*

10) Although the story focuses on Ruth and Boaz, we do see glimpses of the community at Bethlehem, particularly in Chapter 4 – what is their attitude?

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- *The men welcome Ruth into the wider family, and want the best for her (4 v11)*
- *The women celebrate the birth of a new child, and recognise and celebrate Ruth's demonstrated love for Naomi;*
- *They praise God for his blessings (perhaps they were thinking of Psalm 103)*

11) In this short story, we see Ruth, Boaz and the wider community all reflecting in their actions what God's love meant to them. Spend some time reflecting:

- Are there people I am being asked to love and support, as Ruth supported Naomi?
- Do I need to ask for help, as Ruth did?
- Am I in the fortunate position of Boaz, and if so, how can I reflect God's generosity to others?
- As a community of faith, how can we love and support the strangers in our midst?

Space for notes
