

Finding Hope in a God Who Provides The Contrast of Hope

Judges 21:25 - *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

2 options when facing life's challenges and their impact on future joy and ministry:

I. You Can Choose the Path of Faithful Commitment

A. Two important background ideas:

1. A central issue in this book is that of faithfulness

"hesed" – v. 8 - may the Lord deal kindly with you...

covenant faithfulness, loyalty, the ability of a person to make a commitment and keep it

a. Is God able to keep His promises to His people and is it reasonable and appropriate to find your hope in Him?

b. Will God's people choose to be faithful to Him in response to His covenant love?

2. What Naomi was as an individual, Israel was as a nation

B. The power of making a verbal promise

1. Can either minister "death" or "life"

Proverbs 18:21 - *Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*

Revelation 12:11 - *And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony...*

2. Is a reflection of your heart

Matthew 12:34 - *the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*

3. A key component in becoming a Christian

Romans 10:9-10 - *that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*

4. Can either build hope or destroy it

v. 12 - *If I said I had hope...*

C. At times you may have to disagree with the promises some would like you to make

Ruth 1:16 - *But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you..."*

D. Your commitments reveal your functional source of your hope

a. Ruth saw the beauty of staying by Naomi's side and trusting the LORD to provide

v. 14 - *Ruth clung to her...*

Genesis 2:24 - *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.*

b. Ruth was not afraid to make a commitment for life

v. 16 - *where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge...*

c. She understood the relational implications of her choice

1) To people – **v. 16** - *"your people shall be my people"*

2) To God – **v. 16** - *"your God shall be my God"*

d. She recognized that her commitment was being heard and recorded by God Himself

v. 17 - *May the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.*

II. The Path of Bitter Conclusions

A. Why didn't we say "bitter complaints"?

Psalms 73:17 - *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*

B. "Settled bitterness" affects your appearance

Ruth 1:19 - *...and when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"*

1 Peter 3:4 - *but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*

C. "Settled bitterness" can become the grid through which you see yourself

Ruth 1:20 - *She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."*

D. "Settled bitterness" can become the grid through which you view your circumstances, and ultimately your God

Ruth 1:20-21 - *She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"*

1. Bitter people often positively exaggerate their former circumstances

v. 21 - *I went out full...*

2. Bitter people fail to see the blessings right between their eyes

v. 21 - *the Lord has brought me back empty*

3. Bitter people only hear what they want to hear

4. Bitter people have to completely discredit the so-called source of their bitterness

5. It may not be that God has given you an empty life; it may be that you have cultivated an empty heart

Ruth 1:22 - *So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.*

III. Each Option Will Impact Your Ability to See, Receive, and Magnify God's Future Work

A. Naomi, like the Jewish nation she represented, was in no position to recognize or rejoice in what God was preparing to do

Hebrews 12:15 - *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled*

B. Sometimes God uses a "Ruth" to get the attention of others

Ruth 1:22 - *So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab.*