Times of the Judges

GRIEF SHARING

Friday, November 20

Reading: Ruth 1-2

> ***Ruth 1:16*** *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.* ***17*** *Where 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."*

The book of Ruth is a great love story. It reminds us that even in this dark period of Israel's history, there were still people who loved and followed God. In the opening chapters, we meet the three main characters in this love story and each of them has a lesson to teach us.

NAOMI: Naomi is in the depths of depression. She had left her home in Bethlehem to live in Moab because of a famine. However, in this foreign land, she loses her husband and both sons to death. Now she plans to return home and tells her two Moabite daughters-in-law to return to their family homes. She feels that God is against her and requests that people call her Mara ("bitter") instead of Naomi ("pleasant"). She even encourages Ruth to return to her own people and her gods (1:15) - pagan idols which Naomi knows are false and an abomination to the Lord! In her depression, she blames God and believes that He has abandoned her. What she fails to see is the great gift God has given her in the person of Ruth.

RUTH: Moabites were banned from entering "the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:3) because of their nation's hatred of the Israelite people. However, here is Ruth turning her back on her people, her pagan idols, and her past and dedicating herself to her mother-in-law. She puts her trust in the God of Israel and vows that God's people will be her people. She too is grieving the loss of a husband, but she firmly places her confidence in God and helps Naomi in their time of grief.

BOAZ: Once back in Israel, Ruth supports her family by gleaning in the fields, an act supported by the Law of Moses to sustain the poor. It is here that she catches the eye of the owner of the field, Boaz. While his hired workers refer to Ruth somewhat negatively as "the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi", Boaz has a very different attitude. He protects her, shares his meal with her, and blesses her. Instead of "that Moabitess", Boaz praises her for her actions toward Naomi. "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come to take refuge*" (2:12).

LESSON ONE: Like Naomi, do we blame God when tragedy strikes? How do we doubt God's care in difficult times? We need to open our eyes and see how God is using the people and circumstances around us to comfort and uphold us in times of need.

LESSON TWO: Like Ruth, perhaps God wants to use you to help comfort someone else? Maybe you can share their grief because you have gone through something similar yourself (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Do you have faith to let God use you?

LESSON THREE: Like Boaz, do you look for the good in people or do you stereotype and judge people by external things? We need to look at people as God does: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).