Series: Reclaiming God’s Purpose

Ruth

March 3, 2019

Message 1:

**Good Choices in Hard Times**

Ruth 1

**Intro:** How do you make good choices in hard times?

* How do you choose whether or not to take a job in another location which would remove you from extended family?
* How do you choose how to continue your education, when you have no money?
* How do you choose when is the right time to have a family, or whether or not to have more children?
* How do you choose whether or not to marry this person?
* How do you choose when is the right time to retire, or partially retire?

This book is about redemption -

Think of redemption this way … coupon … gift card …

There is a character in this story who is referred to as a family redeemer - he’s going to exchange something, for the value of another person - for the value of family.

Some people in the family get lost … they lose their family … they are in danger of losing everything they have … but there is someone in the family who has what it takes to take them in and take care of them.

In the Old Testament this person was called a “Kinsman Redeemer” - or a “Family Redeemer” -

Sharon and I with the Barnhill’s …

Mandy is serving the Lord … in ministry …

In this story, there are people who lose everything - and there are some things that have to happen - different things have to happen on the part of various people in order for God’s purpose for their lives to be reclaimed.

So - this story is about **Reclaiming God’s Purpose.**

If you don’t feel like your life is everything it should be - if you’re not experiencing everything that you believe God wants you to experience, you need to reclaim God’s purpose -

The story of Ruth helps us with this.

Ruth 1:1- 10 - In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.

Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back to your mothers’ homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage.” Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

“No,” they said. “We want to go with you to your people.”

These ladies have all had VERY hard times …

Some of you here today, have endured some very difficult times …

* examples …

**Big Question: How do we make good choices in hard times?**

Naomi and Ruth give us three keys -

**> When you make your choice, make it with good people.**

Ruth 1:11-15 - But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents’ homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me.”

And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”

Ruth decided she was going to stay with Naomi -

“No turning back …”

Clung … word study - to adhere - to stick like glue —- no separation - as stuck together as anything can be stuck together!

I think today we need to stick with the Church …

The Church is imperfect … but where is your better option?

We need to stick together! Harder times for God’s people may be coming!

Hard times are coming - for you - for everyone -

Who are we going to stand with? Who is going to stand with you?

Are you going to go back to your old way of life? What was there? Was it good?

Stick with God’s people …

John 13:35 - Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Galatians 5:14-15 - For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

Galatians 5:25-26 - Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

Ephesians 4:31-32 - Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Ephesians 5:21 - And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Philippians 2:2 - Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

1st Thessalonians 4:9 - But we don’t need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25 - Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

1st John 3:11 - This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

Let’s stick together - and let’s make the big choices and the big decisions in our lives, with good people!

**> When you make your commitment, make it to last.**

Ruth 1:16-18 - But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

These words were part of our wedding vows …

This commitment has gotten us through some hard times …

* Finances
* Kids
* Death in family
* People who have rejected us

You have the same things in your life … You have people who break trust with you - you have people who try to bring you down.

When you made a commitment - to a person - to a ministry - to a church - to Jesus - was that commitment to last? Or, just as long as things would go ok?

You can’t make a difference if your commitment is not made to last … but:

**> When you stay committed in hardship, you make a difference.**

Ruth 1:19-22 - So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. “Is it really Naomi?” the women asked.

“Don’t call me Naomi,” she responded. “Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?”

So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

People noticed … people heard … yet they knew Naomi would stay strong - and she even had someone with her.

Naomi made a difference in others through her hardship.

Just knowing that our faith in hardship can make a difference can empower us to make the right choices in hard times.

Naomi was key to the conversion of another person’s faith, because of her faithfulness in hardship - and the people of her town noticed that.

Are the people of our town noticing you staying faithful in hardship?

Is your commitment, even in hardship, making a difference in other people’s lives?

Are people coming to the Lord, because they see the strength of the Lord in you, even in the face of difficulty?

Here’s the deal - other people are going through hard times as well.

Naomi’s husband wasn’t the only husband who died …

* Her sons weren’t the only sons who died …
* Naomi wasn’t the only one who had family members bail out on her (Orpah) …

Others had gone through the same hard times -

* The depression had hit everyone -
* The famine, hunger, lack of finances, losing jobs -

When this stuff hits, it hits everybody -

How do others see you standing?

The hard times become opportunities to introduce people to Jesus - if we make good choices during those hard times.

The power of the Holy Spirit …

Acts 3-7 Peter & John

* Heal the man at the Gate Beautiful
* Gave Peter the opportunity to tell about Jesus
* Brought before the Jewish Council - the leaders were disturbed …
* Arrested and put in jail
* The next day they preached Jesus to them
* The Council didn’t know what to do - told them not to preach about Jesus again
* “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”
* As soon as they were freed, they gathered together with the church for prayer
* Acts 5 - Apostles arrested, thrown in jail, but an angel comes and lets them out!
* They went into the Temple and began to tell everyone about Jesus!
* They got arrested again!
* This time, they wanted to kill them - but they ended up flogging them and beating them - letting them go -
* Acts 6 - Stephen is arrested - he’s put on trial - He tells them that Jesus is the fulfillment of every Scripture in their book!
* They stone him to death!

Over and over again … called on trial - beaten - even killed - … but stood firm!

Paul & Silas - Acts 16 …

It always made a difference!

And when local churches in their communities stand strong together in hardship - we will be able to make a difference in the lives of people in our community who are going through difficult times.

**How do we make good choices in hard times?**

**> When you make your choice, make it with good people.**

**> When you make your commitment, make it to last.**

**> When you stay committed in hardship, you make a difference.**