

Subject: When Bad Things Happen to God's People

Scripture: Ruth 1:1-5

- **Job 14:1** *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.*

God's people are not exempt from suffering and tragedy. Two of the hardest questions in life are: Why do the wicked prosper? And why do the righteous suffer? The Book of Ruth is a true story that shows how God brings good out of the worst situations. It is a touching story of love and grace. It has been called the romance of redemption because it is a picture of the salvation we have in Christ.

1. The Famine (vs. 1-2)

This is one of many famines recorded in the Bible. Famines were often God's way to discipline His people. Like many problems in life, this famine was unexpected and unwanted and unpleasant. They lived in Bethlehem which means "House of bread," but now there was no bread, and so Elimelech took his family and moved to Moab.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him (KJV). Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. That way you will realize that nothing is certain in this life (NLT).*

The Bible says that prosperity is not always good and adversity is not always bad.

Prosperity may be a curse and adversity may be a blessing. The important thing is how a person reacts and responds to it. Life is 10% what happens to us and 90% what happens in us. Bad things can make us better or they can make us bitter.

2. The Funerals (vs. 3-5)

The family planned to live in Moab (*vs. 1, sojourn*) for a while and then return when things got better, but it didn't turn out that way. Naomi wanted to return to Bethlehem, but she never intended to return as a widow and as a mother who had lost both of her children.

Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died. ***Hebrews 9:27*** *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:* Ten years later Naomi's sons died. Like all of us, Naomi felt sorrow and sadness. There is pain in parting. She was lonely and confused. She was probably very scared about her future. She wondered, "Why did God let this happen?"

3. The Farewell (vs. 6-15)

Naomi heard *how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread*. I wonder how she felt. Did she realize that God was going to take care of her, too? She blamed God for the death of her husband and her sons (*verse 13*). Naomi was so overwhelmed in her grief that she told her daughters-in-law to stay home and worship their false gods!

Sometimes we can be so wrapped up in our own emotions that we miss opportunities to witness and influence others. But there is a bright spot in the story. Naomi hoped these daughters-in-law could find "rest" (*vs. 9*). That means having a husband and home. (***NLT, vs. 13***) *May the LORD bless you with the security of another marriage.* Despite all the jokes about marriage, the Lord intends for marriage to be restful (peaceful and secure).

4. The Faith (vs. 16-18)

Ruth was determined to go with Naomi and to serve the true and living God. In spite of her statement in verse 15, Naomi had made an impact on Ruth, and she was converted to God. Ruth made one of the greatest statements in the Bible (*vs. 16-17*). Ruth decided to give up her country, culture, her people, her language, and her religion. Ruth could sing, "I

am resolved no longer to linger, charmed by the world's delight. Things that are higher, things that are nobler, these have allured my sight." God used these circumstances to bring Ruth to Himself. How would Naomi and Ruth ever meet if it hadn't been for the famine? Would they have grown this close had it not been for the death of the husband and the boys?

5. The Frustration (vs. 19-22)

When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, she said "Don't call me Naomi (pleasantness), but call me Mara (bitterness)." She says, *the Almighty has made life very bitter for me (vs. 20, NLT)*. She called God "the Almighty" (Shaddai). In other words, she said, "Who can stop Him or change His mind?" She admitted how she really felt. She was depressed and felt like God had let her down. When they returned home to Bethlehem it was *the beginning of barley harvest (vs. 22)*. This was a time of celebration and joy. The harvest was beginning to come in. It was springtime, and everybody's spirits were high, everybody except Naomi's. It's tough to be around happy people when your dreams have been shattered. Even at church it's tough. We need to be able to show our true feelings and have compassion for one another. **Romans 12:15** *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

Lessons to Remember When Bad Things Happen:

- A. Bad things happen when you least expect it. It could be death, sickness, or divorce
- B. When bad things happen God is still at work. He is always working in the details of our life. He is constantly working behind the scenes. **Romans 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*
- C. When bad things happen special people often come into our lives. God provided Ruth for Naomi in her time of need.
- D. When bad things happen we can show that God is real and personal. Ruth wanted to serve Naomi's God.
- E. When bad things happen we can be honest about our feelings.
- F. When bad things happen God may do His greatest work in our lives. Naomi's problems caused her to think that God was her enemy, but He had plans for her not yet revealed. When we can't see God's hand, we can trust His heart. Don't doubt in the darkness what God has shown in the light. We need to know that God loves us no matter what.