



# Part 1: Defining Moments

## INTRODUCTION — Women as God-Revealers

### Three Guiding Principles for This Series:

- 1) The Bible is both culturally embedded and culturally revolutionary. It speaks the language of a culture in order to plant a seed of truth within that culture that will grow into a principle that transcends all culture. Therefore, we understand and apply Scripture by first asking what it means within that culture and context. Only when we understand that do we move on to ask what the transcendent principles are that apply to our context.
- 2) Women function as God's image bearers, revealers of God to the world. If we fail to pay close attention to their story and experience, we will fail to know God as we should. (**Isaiah 66:13; 1 Peter 2:2-3**)
- 3) Every Bible story is ultimately about God revealing himself and his Gospel to us. This may seem like a series about women and on the surface it is. But at a deeper level it is a series about God and his Good News to us. Keep your eyes open for it.

## LOOK TO THE BOOK – Bare Naked Ladies

### Ruth 1

- Seeks to elevate the value of women in a patriarchal world.
- Only book in the Bible where the women talk more than the men.
- The Moabites were not friends with Israel. Originated from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his older daughter; their king had hired Balaam to curse Israel; they were accused of leading Israel into idol worship; as recently as Judges 3 they had oppressed Israel.
- Some Reformed scholars see Naomi's tragedy as God's punishment for living in a foreign land, but this theory ignores a) the neutrality of the text, and b) God's blessing on other Hebrews who sought refuge in foreign lands during hard times.
- The "kindness" of verse 8 = *hesed*, which is God's unfailing, loyal love; where caring and commitment meet and fuse together. This is the love that becomes *agape* (unconditional love), in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX or Septuagint).
- Naomi's care for Orpah and Ruth seems rooted in a belief that God can meet them and take care of them even within their pagan culture (see **Psalm 145:8-9**). Orpah is not portrayed as a failure or evil, but simply making the 'sensible' choice counselled by her mother-in-law.
- When Ruth chooses to live in Israel, her cultural oppression more than triples. She will now not only be a woman, a widow, and childless, but also a foreigner.
- Some liberal Western writers read a lesbian relationship into Ruth's loyalty. But this is a retrojection of wishful thinking into a text that never hints at the idea.
- Naomi claims to have left Israel "full" and returned "empty". She is still a product of her culture. She was not "full" but famine-stricken. She is not "empty" but befriended by Ruth. Naomi defines her life only in terms of male relatives.

## TAKE OUTS – I'll Have That To Go Please

### TAKE OUT #1: Bitterness as an Expression of Faith

If you are angry or bitter about life, consider the faith from which it springs. If you believed all of life was the product of random chance, then dispassionate resignation would be the logical response. Bitterness, although a negative reaction, is a reaction against the backdrop of an existing relationship. Now, since you can't help believe in God, try adjusting your focus to land on Jesus whose life demonstrates how relentlessly God turns the worst circumstances into the best blessing. (See **2 Corinthians 4:6-7**.)

### TAKE OUT #2: Taking Care of "Widows" (those with no voice among the crowds)

The Hebrew word for "widow", *almanah*, comes from the root word, *alem*, which means "unable to speak". A widow is someone who has lost her voice in society. Taking care of widows is a hallmark of Christian faith (**John 19:26-27; Acts 6:1-6; James 1:27**; etc.). What "widows" are you drawing into your circle of relationship?

### TAKE OUT #3: Choosing God AND His People

Ruth chooses not to return to her land and her gods, but to embrace Yahweh and his people. Why not serve God privately back home? Ruth demonstrates that a vibrant faith grows out of relational rootedness in faith-filled community. Biblical spirituality is a communal experience. Are you trying to go it alone? Learn from Ruth's example.

### TAKE OUT #4: Choosing Bold Love

Ruth chooses significance over security, loyal love over prosperity, and sacrifice over self-preservation. She becomes the paradigm of Christ and of the call of Christ to his followers. What hard choice lies ahead for you? Choosing to walk toward God rather than security, safety, and self-preservation is to discover the pearl of great price.

## CONCLUSION – Camping At The Crossroads

Matthew 13:44

### RECOMMENDED READING...

- *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules*, by Carolyn Custis James

## HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

### WARMING UP...

1. What are you most/least looking forward to in this series?
2. Take time to review this week's message. Talk about what most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you.

### LOOK TO THE BOOK...

3. Read through Ruth 1 again. A) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? B) Scholars compare Naomi with Job. In what ways is their experience similar? Different? C) Who are the widows today that the church should be structured to care for? How might this affect your Home Church? D) In what ways might women still have a more challenging life in our culture today? How should this reality inform how the Church functions? E) What examples can you think of in the gospels that demonstrate Jesus' high value of women? F) Have you ever shared Naomi's view of God in this chapter (e.g., verses 13, 20-21)? If so, what helped you to readjust it?

### SO WHAT?...

4. What "Take Out" is most relevant to your life at this time? How so?
5. Take time to meditate on **Ruth 1:16-17**. Talk about what God is showing you about your life in response to these verses.

**Bruxy Cavey @ THE MEETING HOUSE – Sunday, July 5, 2009**