

Ruth 4:13-17

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17 The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

All Saints is a time that is set aside each church year to remember those who died in faith. During our Friends fellowship group meeting we were studying the book *The Girl's Still Got It* by Liz Curtis Higgs. The book we were studying is about the Old Testament book of Ruth. While I was preparing to teach the lesson I came across a resource that stated "Naomi's story is good for a sermon on All Saints Day." So, I made a note and saved it for today.

Ruth is a very short book in the Bible with only four chapters. It is not like the other Bible books. It is not about a nation, or heroes, judges, prophets, and kings. It is about a private family and their relationships. Naomi had a husband and two 2 sons. They left Bethlehem due to a severe famine and went to Moab. This poses a big problem. The Moabites have a history of being hostile to Israel. In fact, they have been bitter enemies from the time Israel was in the wilderness after escaping from slavery in Egypt until long after they settled in Canaan. For Naomi to go there is a big disgrace. While there in Moab her husband dies. Her the two sons marry Moabite women but both of her sons die. So, Naomi is in a very sympathetic position as would be anyone that has lost a husband and her children. She has no grandchildren. In a patriarchal society where everything is controlled by men, having no men in her life means that she has no means for survival. She is despondent and impoverished. But she finds out that Israel has returned to prosperity. So, she decides to go back home to Bethlehem and takes Ruth, her daughter-in-law with her. But Bethlehem does not offer her a warm greeting. She has disgraced them when she abandoned her own people for a better life only to return for the exact same reason. Her loyalty has not been to her people of Bethlehem. Her loyalty has been completely selfish.

I am reminded of an interesting story called *Acres of Diamonds* as told by Earl Nightingale. An African farmer finds out that neighboring farmers have struck it rich by discovering diamond mines. He dreams of finding a diamond mine. So, he sold his farm and spent the rest of his life searching but he could never find the gleaming gems that he desired. Worn out and despondent he threw himself into a river and drowned. Meanwhile, the man that bought the farm was crossing a stream and saw a flash of colored light reflecting from the stream bottom. He bent down and picked up the stone. He admired it and brought it home and set it on the fireplace mantel. A considerable amount of time went by until one day a friend picked up the stone, looked closely at it, and told him it was a diamond. It turns out the creek was full of them. The farm that was sold so that he might find a diamond mine turned out to be a productive diamond mine. The farmer had owned, free and clear acres of diamonds but he sold it to look for them elsewhere. The story has very clear moral. The man did not know what diamonds looked like in the rough.

Now back to the problem addressed in the Bible. Naomi went looking for a better life to end up suffering from the consequences of her own choosing. Then she blames God for her misfortune. She thinks the death of her husband and sons is the result of divine judgment. This is an interesting theological concept. Is Naomi right? Did she lose her husband and children due to a wrathful God? My position is this. Blaming God for the death of a loved one is selfish. I will explain it this way. This past summer I was engaged in a conversation about someone's mother that has lost faith due to school shootings. She wrestled with why a loving God would allow this. So, I asked "Did she ever have faith?" There are four points to my position. 1, When someone falls away because something bad happens. Jesus explains it better than I can in the parable of the sower. The seed that fell in rocky soil fell away during times of tribulation because it had no roots. Therefore, it was never in the fertile soil. So, did she ever have faith? 2, She did not question how a loving God could allow millions upon millions that died from other causes such as homicide, genocide, suicide, the Holocaust, and war. She didn't blame God for alcoholism, drug addiction, child abuse, chronic pain, and cancer. The only time she blame God is when it hits close to home. That makes it a selfish position. 3, I find it ironic (I think when people blame God they really don't think this through) people blame the One who suffered for them. It is selfish to expect God to suffer and then intervene to prevent our suffering. One thing that is truly special about God is that God suffers with us. In the book *The Girl's Still Got It*, the author Liz Curtis Higgs states bluntly "There is no point in blaming God or yourself for tragic events. The reality is, they happen." 4, The Bible teaches us that God allows. Of all the lessons in the Bible, one thing is very clear. God allows! God allows Satan. God allows Jesus to be tempted, persecuted, and executed. God allows everything from Genesis with Adam & Eve, the flood, the tower of Babel, to the end of Revelation with the sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, and idolaters. Virtually every lesson of the Bible shows God dealing with both the good and the bad. God calls on the people to be good. God tells the people not to be bad. The bad that exists in the world comes from those that do not obey God.

Naomi's story ends with a happy ending. The consummation of the marriage is a human activity but the conception of the child is credited as a gift from God. Naomi was empty due to the loss of her husband and sons. Naomi was bitter due to her hardship. She is now filled with a happy sense of self worth. The new birth is blessing to her. If Naomi had another son, he would have inherited everything and carried on family name. Now the family heritage is carried out through her grandchild. Naomi is blessed as the story moves from sorrow to joy. That is our contemporary lesson. The Lord does not abandon you. The Lord suffers with you. The Lord blesses you.