

SUMMER SERMON SERIES

SHATTERED DREAMS – PRICELESS TREASURE

July 27	Going away and coming back	(Ruth 1)
Aug 10	Wings of Refuge	(Ruth 2)
17	Love on the threshing floor	(Ruth 3)
24	Hope is born	(Ruth 4)

I have to confess it's one of my favourites, the Book of Ruth. So we're making time this summer to take a look at it together.

It's a great love story, poor foreign widow struggling to make ends meet in an alien land meets rich eligible bachelor. They fall in love and after overcoming many obstacles they marry and their union is blessed with the birth of a child. If that were all there was to the story of Ruth, I guess we could leave it to Hollywood to make the film. But equally if that were all there was, why do we find Ruth as part of the Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus' Bible?

Much of the significance of the Book of Ruth lies in its context, what goes before and what comes after. The very first verse sets the scene "in the days when the judges ruled". It was a time when Israel had no king or centralised government, a time of sporadic warfare with neighbouring peoples, and a time when they were rarely united and rarely faithful to the Lord.

The indigenous peoples, Canaanites, had survived in scattered settlements raising their crops and worshipping their male and female nature gods, the Baals and Ashteroths believing these gods controlled the land, the weather and the fertility of flocks and fields. The Israelites were attracted to these undemanding, pleasure giving gods, mixing worship of the Baals with that of Yahweh (pick and mix religion is nothing new!). This weakened their loyalty to the Lord (Yahweh) and to each other. This inner decay was a far more serious threat to Israel's survival than any external attack. The judges were men and women whom God raised up to bring rescue to his people. Frequently faced with God's judgement at the hands of their enemies, they looked for God's help and in his mercy God sent saviour judges like Samson, Gideon and Deborah. It was however a chaotic period with little evidence of any real or lasting change of heart among God's people. In the midst of all this we read the story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz or better we should say the story of God going 'quietly' about his business of planning to save Israel from her enemies and herself, and more than that planning a rescue for all the world. But for that you'll have to wait until chapter 4, Matthew 1 and the birth of the baby.

However while that gives us the big picture of what God is doing there's another story being told, it's the story of Naomi. It's a story of shattered dreams. Everything that was precious to Naomi is taken away and she returns to Bethlehem without a husband and without her sons, she has lost everything and God has apparently done nothing. She's angry, she's hurt. God doesn't take away the pain but He does grow in Naomi, through her tears, a new dream, a deeper longer than anything she has known before. It's a dream, a hope that stirs in her real joy. Yes, life still hurts – but there is joy. We see it most clearly as she sits with the baby in her lap – her hope for the future, and of course God's gift, His plan for a Saviour. So it's a story about loss, about our shattered dreams and how out of our pain a new dream can come. So there are tears (but through the tears we're introduced to God's Saviour and Naomi's hope, a child born to Ruth and Boaz. The child's name was Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, Yahweh's King, whose greater Son is Jesus Christ – God's Saviour King, our everlasting hope and joy.

(Well who could have guessed it – the Book of Ruth is all about Jesus so it has to be one of my favourites!!)