

Tragedy to Triumph: Ruth and the Modern World Sufferings: A Case Study on the Character of Ruth

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Abstract

The book of Ruth is one of the most powerful depictions of being a helping hand in a time of great agony and trouble. It is a true picture of the Church helping the poor and needy in the midst of a desperate situation caused by COVID-19. In this piece, the researcher has argued that being a helping hand does not imply becoming a social worker, but rather that our duty to approach the dying world is greater than that.

The case study of Ruth's character provides us a model of Jesus; a foreshadowing of Christ to give up our comfortable zones in the midst of this pandemic. Furthermore, this article provides a missiological approach to reaching the unreached in order to demonstrate God's love amidst of adversity through Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Ruth, COVID-19, Christ, Church, Missiological,

Introduction

Life gives us unpleasant and frustrating shocks. We can say that life can change in a moment: a tragedy, natural evil, a shattered relationship, sad experiences, even pandemics can take our loved ones away from us, and we can drench into the depths of sorrows and pain. We can even lose sight of the qualities that make us who we are.

Like the previous year, this year has also begun with a lot of emergencies and misfortunes. The whole world is suffering because of COVID-19, every community and every religion is on the same page whether they are Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, or Bhai community. We all have the same mandate to get rid of the current pandemic. Isn't it a narrow scope for all of us to show off unity and to become one voice only during this grave situation? Yet the Church has a high obligation in this social distancing world to bring people to Christ and to reach the unreached, where people are unable to have intimacy with loved ones.

Thus, this piece of writing focuses on the character of Ruth by following a missiological approach to the present unfortunate condition that everybody is living through. Whether it is a relationship, education, or finances. This paper also briefly glimpses into the characters of Naomi (Ruth's mother-in-law) and Orpah (Ruth's sister-in-law). Orpah stayed back in Moab and did not carry on the journey with Ruth and Naomi. Moreover, the intention to write this piece has a dual purpose. The first is to look at a similar image from the bible some 5000 years ago to discuss today's world scenario. The second argument is that the Church must perform its duty by loving your neighbor as yourself in any situation as a good Samaritan. The goal is also to address today's challenges by using Ruth's experience and proclaiming that trusting God in suffering is the only way to keep going.

Ruth is a Narrative of the Present-day Sufferings and Role model to the Church

Amid COVID-19, the situation has gone worse all over the world. Different people are perceiving pandemics via distinct ideologies. However, the book of Ruth offers such a wonderful insight that God does not function in one direction only. Rather, He is a creative God who is not bound to work in one mode. He always reveals Himself using different situations and strategies amidst the situation when people are imprisoned in their

thoughts and relying on their inadequate approaches. Intense situations can turn into a moment of anxiety and fear, as the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi addresses the themes of displacement suffering and loss of identity. Even then Ruth proves loyalty to the covenant and shows fidelity towards the God of Israel even in times of suffering.

In the middle of tough scenarios, there is always a chance of misleading ourselves to misunderstand the will of God, yet it is the will of God that prevails (Psalm 33:11). Another point of observation is that Orpah was convinced to stay behind. She must have been paranoid, scared, and lost all hope, and could no longer bear the idea of spending her life in uncertainty. Therefore, Orpah was convinced to kiss Naomi goodbye, but Ruth clung to her (Ruth 1:14). The bestselling author Renae asserts:

“Orpah did what many of us would have done. We reason things out in our minds. Sometimes, we make decisions based on what looks right on paper even when those decisions just don't feel right. Ruth stepped out in faith and followed her heart, and she was blessed because of it. If she had taken the easy way, she would have missed God's amazing favor on her life.”¹

Even if Naomi was persistent in sending Ruth back to her culture as she did to Orpah, (Ruth 1:11-13,15), Ruth was determined not to leave Naomi (Ruth 1:16).

The prosperity of the church for growing up with Christ can be revealed in the character of Ruth. To do so, the present church needs to follow her lead by returning to the place of God. By giving up the pagan world of idolatry, i.e., carnal desires and

¹ Renae Brumbaugh Green, *Latte for Life: 45 Devotions from the Book of Ruth – Decision*, (Broad Street Publishing Group, LLC, 2017), 7.

worldly comforts. And abandoning herself to the living God with absolute trust. In the next verse, she also declares her decision,

“Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.
May the Lord do so to me and more also if
anything but death parts me from you” (Ruth
1:17).

Though she was addressing Naomi, her allegiance was with the God of Israel. She gave up everything relating to her past, to enter the promised land. So, it is required for the present Church to give up its worldly desires to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Ruth's suffering is a Simulation of Christ Sufferings to Bring Hope and Restoration to the Destitute World

The life of Ruth is characterized by constant modesty. She probably belonged to a rich family in Moab, but she gleaned happily, having to rely on the remnants of others and the generosity of the landowner. Ruth does not look back longingly to her old life. Instead, she focuses on what she will do to provide for Naomi and herself and God honors her efforts.

Ruth's intention to suffer was to be a source of joy and peace to someone. Ruth's faith and obedience to show kindness amid sufferings will inevitably lead to hope. Same as when we are encouraged to tolerate sufferings willingly as Ruth, the result bears fruits (Romans 5:3-5).

In verses 1:20 - 21 when the two of them went on and came to Bethlehem, And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, do not call me Naomi (means pleasant); call me Mara (means bitter), for the Almighty, has dealt very bitterly with me. She also made a statement that she went full and came back empty.

Naomi seems angry with God. By making this statement she ignores Ruth. While she returns with the most sincere, loyal, and trustworthy daughter who gave up everything never to leave her alone. It must have been a heartbreaking moment for Ruth, and she must have reassembled herself to forget Naomi's false assertion. She must have felt like someone standing outside and looking in. But even in this hard situation, she never ceases to love Naomi. She made sure that Naomi got plenty to eat. She worked tirelessly to get what they wanted for survival. Ruth reminds us of this reality that God is in charge. Even in the worst and bitter circumstances, we should continue to believe that God is there (Psalm 23:4). Lord Himself promises that "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..." (Joel 2:25). Later, Ruth was married to a nobleman, which was a step upward and inward towards restoration. She wed to Boaz, who became King David's grandfather.

Ruth's Way is the Right Way to Bring in More People to Christ's Feet

The word of the Lord says "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold..." (John 10:16). The purpose to call gentiles is to uplift their stature in the society as prophet Isaiah has portrayed (Isaiah 40:4). It is also part of God's divine plan to free people from the shackles of cultural norms, rituals, and rites (Luke 4:18).

We see that Ruth is amongst one of that sheep from the other fold to whom God called to glorify His name. While she was a Gentile, Ruth became part of the genealogical line of David that led to the birth of Jesus. She was unaware that living God would use her story to demonstrate love for the world (John 3:16). Pope Francis states:

"In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to

the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business!"²

Ruth would have gone back to relive a happy life, but she did not leave her old mother-in-law alone in predicaments. Rather she depicts beautiful imagery of a person whose heart is moved with compassion for the needy. Naomi was traumatized and had lost all her hope, she was old, desperate, and alone and she needed someone at that time. Ruth stood with her and treated her as a real mother. As scripture clearly states, "Bear one another's burdens..." (Galatians 6:2). And in the second chapter, we find out that she even started working in the fields to meet daily domestic needs. Ruth is a great example of devoting our life to the interest of others. As Mother Teresa said,

"We are not social workers, we are really contemplatives right in the heart of the world, for we are touching the body of Christ -- twenty-four hours..."³

This approach is also a fulfillment of Jesus' commandment (John 13:34-35) and an exact picture of having a Christ-like attitude (Philippians 2:5).

By doing as Ruth and as Jesus has commanded, we put Jesus in the center of our lives and become the testimony of God's love for mankind.

² VISIT TO LAMPEDUSA, HOMILY OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS, "Arena" sports camp, Salina Quarter, Monday, 8 July 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html (accessed on November, 2021).

³ Fratel Yesudas, Like Mother Teresa, we are not social workers, but co-workers in the love of God, AsiaNews, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Like-Mother-Teresa,-we-are-not-social-workers,-but-co-workers-in-the-love-of-God-16842.html> (accessed on November, 2021).

Ruth is the foreshadow of Christ

As Naomi depicts the persecuted Church, we see Ruth as the foreshadow of Christ, Christ does everything to bring up His people, and even offers His life for the beloved Church. Ruth's willingness to serve Naomi is a foreshadow of Christ who willingly gave up the comfortable life for the suffering world (Noami). Ruth had many opportunities; she would have remarried to some wealthy man and had lived an easy life. Rather, she accepted suffering by walking with Naomi, as Christ also did for His Church (Philippians 2:6-8). David Atkinson notes that:

“Our lives and our relationships are intended to mirror God's life and God's relationships.”⁴

Present World and its Challenges (Missiological Implications)

In the light of Ruth's character, the present Church should have a more vivid vision to follow the example of Christ. It is the Church's responsibility to present the model of Christ. Nee says:

“Not only is Adam in the image of God, so also is Eve. Not only does Christ have the life of God, the Church also has God's life.”⁵

It is also the responsibility of the present-day Church to restore the image of God not just through words but through acts. The Church may be in Ruth's place by observing modesty and humility, or it may be in Naomi's position, hit by sorrow and despair, but held to trust in God. As members of His Church, God has given us a community to offer support. We can be

⁴ David Atkinson, *The Wings of Refuge: The Message of Ruth. The Bible Speaks Today*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 83.

⁵ Watchman Nee, *The Glorious Church*, (2431 W, LA Palma Ave., Anaheim, C A 92801, USA, Living Stream Ministry), 28.

Jesus to each other and an example of God's love to those who do not know Him (John 13:35). Ruth encourages us to follow this mission by having faith even in our dense times.

Through the events in the book of Ruth, and amid this worse present world situation I would propose "Missiological Journey Towards Suffering" a model that is a theme of the Old Testament in Ruth's story to save the dying community. Christians today must understand not only the importance of being Church but also the meaning of their work. We should be accustomed to seeing the hand of God most distinctly.

It is noteworthy to remember that not only pastors, missionaries, and evangelists are responsible to carry the word of God and bring people to Christ's feet. Rather it is the duty of every citizen of the heavenly kingdom who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior to carry out this mission. The life of a believer is constantly at work to give glory to the kingdom of the Lord and is always illuminating in the darkest parts of the world. As the scripture testifies:

"[L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The desperate world wants to see Jesus in me and you so that being 'light and salt' the world praises God.

Conclusion

Naomi was old, desperate, and alone and she needed someone by her side, and she found favor from God in the image of Ruth. Naomi is a world that is suffering and full of tragedies and on the other hand the strong and consistent character of Ruth who did not leave her in this critical situation. This willingness to serve and agape love is the love of God, and a believer is an extension. It is the cornerstone upon which both Ruth and the

whole bible stand. David A. Leggett coherently states the matter by saying:

“Yahweh cares for the widow and rewards fidelity in human affairs.”⁶

In today’s circumstances, Ruth's character gives a deep insight into our lives. The book of Ruth is a love story between a mother and a daughter and foreshadows Christ’s love for His Church. It represents God’s unceasing love and unending faithfulness. Though Ruth experienced disaster, sorrow, weakness, and disappointment, there is also good news: in the story, we see God's strong and gentle character, full of grace, filled with affection, providence, and hope. It is a story about transformation, about God turning our “mourning into dancing” (Psalm 30:11).

Ruth's narrative and character also offer a method of evangelism and a way to participate in the conversation with other faiths through love, grace, forgiveness, and putting others over oneself.

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⁶ Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth*, (Cherry Hill: Mack Publishing Company, 1974), 165.

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