Study in Ruth 1

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Preacher: Rev R.G.Mackay

[0:00] I'd like us to turn now to the book of Ruth, to the book of Ruth and to look at the first six verses of that book that we read together earlier.

What's really happening in our world in these days? The events that have overtaken the royal family in the last week have surely caused us to wonder what is going to happen in our country in these coming days, in these coming years.
Are there going to be dramatic changes or are there not? What's going to happen in the United States of America under a new precedent?
It seems to me very different from the last one. Will it make all that much difference? Or will it not?
Do you ever think about the possibilities of what can happen when one man is all of a sudden given such amazing and frightening power?
[1:16] What's the future for Eastern Europe? And what was the USSR?

A year or two ago we were quite confident, weren't we, that it was all sorted out and it would lead to great blessing? Has it? And will it?
We ask these questions. But do they really bother us?
We perhaps ask them just because, well, we feel it's good to be up to date and it's good to talk about these things. But are we really concerned about the great events of state and of international relations?
We've become a little bit sceptical and cynical about the whole thing and we wonder, well, do we have a say anyway? What's been happening at Holyrood House over these past couple of days?
[2:34] Do we know? Do we understand? I don't. Does it matter?

Is it perhaps just as well for us to bury our heads in the sand and just to get on with living our own lives the best we can? Is it a case that things are getting a wee bit out of hand and, well, we can't do very much about it?
Is it just as well to bury our heads in the sand, forget about these great affairs and get on with living our own little lives?
Well, I think that the book of Ruth in the Old Testament has something to say about these questions and has answers to give us. And when things perhaps at a high level seem to be getting out of hand, God has something to say to us ordinary people.
I think that's what the book of Ruth is about. And so God comes to us in this word through the book of Ruth and into a situation when the whole world situation seems to be in a mess and we're not sure where it's going and we're not sure what we ought to be doing about it.
[4:08] God comes in his word and God speaks. And I think the first thing that the book of Ruth is saying to us is that God's word is relevant.

In the middle of all this situation, the first and most important thing is not what's the colour of our politics, not what's our view about Europe or what's our view about East and West, but firstly, before we can say anything about these things, where do we see God and his word sticking into it all?
Because God's word is relevant. You see, we may ask, why is this little book of Ruth included in God's word?
Could we have done without it? Well, of course, there's an obvious answer to that question. God has written it down in his word. God sees that we need it and that we must have it.
And he has written it by his inspiration, along with all the other books of the Bible, and he has protected it for us over the years. But why? Why is it there?
[5:37] Well, the opening verse tells us that it is clearly related to the book of Judges. It's really a continuation. It's really part of this important period of history.

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And it's got something to say to us. And we've already seen the way that the book of Judges is summed up for us in chapter 2 that we read earlier. If we just go back to it for just a minute. Judges chapter 2, and we read verse 8, and then we read verses 10 to 12. And Joshua the son of Nan, the servant of the Lord, died, being a hundred and ten years old.
And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers, and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.
And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, that had brought them out of the land of Egypt. And so you see, the book of Judges, and therefore the book of Ruth, is set in a context that is very relevant to our own day.
[6:43] There are real similarities, despite the fact that there are these decades and centuries between Ruth and ourselves. It's the same sort of day.

It's a day when largely the God of our fathers, the God who has blessed this land in times past with reformation, with revival, with safety and security in times of warfare, he has been forgotten.
And people have largely turned to their own ways. These were the times of Naomi and the times of Ruth, and they are our times.
And God has put a record of such times in his book, the Bible. And he says, I have something to say in these days also, and I have a word that is relevant to these sort of days.
It's not just in days when many are turning to the Lord, when many are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not just in days of revival that God's word is relevant.
[8:08] But in days when the masses are turning their backs on God, in these days also, God is at work, and God is speaking, and God's word is relevant.

And very interestingly, when we come to the Christmas story, when we come to the story of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the book of Ruth is quoted, if you like.
Matthew chapter 1 and verse 5, when the birth of Jesus is about to be announced, and we are given there the history of the genealogy of the man Christ Jesus.
We read at verse 5 of Matthew chapter 1, and Salmon begat Boaz of Rehob, and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David the king.
And that's essentially what the book of Ruth is about. It's giving us an insight away before the time of the coming of Jesus, and at a time when it seemed that the whole world was forgetting about the God of Moses and the God of Joshua.
[9:47] In these days also, God was at work. God was working out his plan. Oh, there were centuries yet until that plan would be fully seen in the coming of Jesus as the man Christ Jesus into this world.

But the plan was moving forward relentlessly. It was moving forward in the generation when Rahab, the prostitute, was brought into the family line.
And it was working too in these days when Ruth, the Moabite, was also brought into the line. And she met this man Boaz that we may learn about.
And a baby was born who was in the direct line down to King David and eventually to King Jesus. That's the great message of this book.
In times like these, God is at work. In times like these, God's word is relevant.
[11:03] Is that our reaction to the great affairs of state and of international relations in these days?

Of course they are confused. The whole world is going mad. But only because of the sovereign permission of our God.
The God who has written down his plan in the Bible. And so in these days when the world is going mad, it is a day when God is saying to every one of us, are you just going to bury your heads in the sand in the midst of such confusion?
Are you just going to hide yourself and hope for the best that the final calamity never comes? Or are you going to turn with new diligence to the scriptures?
Are you going to come before the Lord as Mary of Bethany did in the days of Jesus? And are you going to sit at his feet and are you going to say humbly, Lord, I don't understand.
[12:38] But you have a plan. You are working. It seems so hidden in these days. You see, without the hindsight that we now have, how could we possibly have understood what God was doing through Naomi and Ruth?

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and we need to come and we need to seek our God and we need to plead with him more and more to teach us and to lead us.
the whole world is going wrong. The whole world is making a mess. Are we going to stand up and say, oh, but I won't make a mess of things?
Surely we're not going to be so arrogant as to say that. Surely we're going to say, I don't understand, Lord, except you teach me.
this is a day to diligently search the scriptures. This is a day for opening my Bible day after day after day and praying to you, my God, that you will teach me and that you will enable me to know your ways and to follow them and to do them.
[14:16] And then there's another thing that encourages us when we see that the book of Ruth is saying that God's word is relevant. It's a book about ordinary people.

Oh, there were things going on amongst the leaders of the day in the days of Judges, in the days of Ruth, things going on in high places that were none too pretty.
God in his quiet way was working and working amongst ordinary people.
Working amongst people that the world wouldn't bother about. Working supremely amongst women.
God in the day yes, we've got it again. We had it, was it last Sunday evening? That was what happened when Jesus came into this world when he was born. Great honour given to some of the women like Elizabeth and Mary whom the society of the day would naturally despise and keep and keep it at a very low position.
[15:40] That's where God was working. That's where God was doing his great work. That's always where God does his great work.

We saw that from Mr. McDonald last Sunday evening. Jesus doesn't come to call the righteous. those who think they've got a position. Those who think that they're important.
Those who think that they're okay. He's come to call sinners to repentance. You and your ordinariness.
Me and my ordinariness. Whatever is going on in high places. we can meet with our God today. And if we will come to him and bow before him he can do a work in that can be significant for all eternity.
[16:51] So don't let us bury our heads in the sand in case we miss God and his great work. The word of God is relevant.

But then I think the book of Ruth is saying that the word of God is real. That is it deals with reality. not a way up there in the sky. And isn't that the way so often with the great affairs of states. It all seems so unreal to us.
When we see these great cavalcades of limousines it's like another world it's like another planet. it. But that's not where God's word reaches to and stops.
What hope would there be for any of us here this morning if God's word only spoke to the unreal world as it seems to us of limousines and cavalcades oh God's word can speak there because of course there are real people there also in need of the Saviour.
[18:25] But the Bible is full of variety of stories to impress upon us that wherever we are as real people in this world with real problems and real circumstances there God's word comes.

That's where the book of Ruth begins. It begins with a real situation that could be relevant to any of us here this morning.
It begins with a family making decisions about how to make ends meet. That's what the book of Ruth's about. A real family in a real family situation in days of famine in days if you like of unemployment and needing to make ends meet needing to live and how were they going to do it? That's real isn't it? whatever whatever social bracket we put ourselves into this morning whatever financial bracket we put ourselves into whatever is going to be the slot that we're going to be slotted into when the council tax comes along we're all taken up with making ends meet oh there are those of us who can do with less than others but we're involved from day to day from week to week with that real situation and that's where the book of Ruth comes to and it comes to the decision that was made the famine was there and the promised land that they'd come into just a generation or two ago just perhaps one generation ago and now there was famine in the land and it was difficult to live and what were they going to do about it and so the decision was made to go down to Moab while they had the chance see what they could do for themselves there they would emigrate and the

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question that has to be posed is was that a right decision or a wrong decision was it right or was it wrong because that's what the
Bible is all about it's about what's right and what's wrong well surely a man had to provide for his family we might say and didn't Jacob go down to Egypt in days of famine so wasn't it okay for Elimelech and his family to go down to Moab well was it I'm sure this is a point that one mustn't be over dogmatic about but it seems to me that the evidence is stacked against Elimelech and his family Jacob went down to Egypt of course because God had clearly prophesied beforehand through the dreams of Joseph his son and Joseph a man of God that this is the way things were to be but there is no evidence that there was such prophetic word given to
[21:52] Elimelech indeed it's quite the opposite you see we've got to remember that this is set in the days of the book of the judges and that day is summed up for us in Judges 21 and verse 25 in those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes and that seems to be the way of it Elimelech went down to Moab because it was what seemed to be right in his own eyes there's no evidence of him consulting the laws of God there's no evidence of him praying to the Lord or thinking of what the Lord has to say now you might say and you might say quite correctly but surely you're not going to put too much weight on what's not said in the scriptures and that would be true that we mustn't put too much weight on what the scriptures doesn't say we must put most of our weight on what the scriptures does say well there's perhaps something interesting do you notice for instance something interesting at verse 6 the first five verses have really told us the whole story they've put it into a short bulk what happened over a period of years and it's the all that happened from them going down into mob and what happened to them while they were in mob and then at verse 6 there comes the first intimation of a turning and of a going back to Israel of course

Elimelech and his sons have now died it's just Naomi who's left of the ones who came down from Israel and at verse 6 is the first time that the name of the Lord is mentioned in the book of Ruth in all that's to do with the decisions to go down to Moab and to remain in Moab nothing said about the Lord but when it comes to the turning and to going back to Israel then the name of the Lord is mentioned and then you see they went down because of famine now the Lord in his laws in the days of Moses and in the days of Joshua he had laid down laws about famine he had told them what to think about when famine would come on the land we have it in Leviticus chapter 26 if you will not hearken unto me then I will punish you and I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass and your land shall not yield her increase and then later down in that chapter at verse 40 but if they shall confess their iniquity then
I will change and I will bless you the famine came there is no evidence about what they were to do about their sin there is only evidence about how they are to make ends meet there is no evidence about what needs to happen in their souls in their hearts there is only evidence about what they need to do for their bodies things is this sometimes our problem when we get into difficulty when we have to face up to the problems and the tensions and the hardships and the disappointments and the bitter experiences of this life what's our first thought is our first thought how am I to get over this how am I to cope with this how am I to put a brave face onto the world how am I to feel more comfortable how am I to feel more at peace without immediately saying what can the Lord do for me in this situation what is the Lord wanting to teach me here is this an opportunity to know more of the Lord
Jesus Christ and his love and his faithfulness and then you see there's another evidence that would suggest that the decision that was made to go down to Moab was a wrong decision in verse one and a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab and that word really means went to live for a while it's got a temporariness about it the word that is used he went for a while until the famine was over that was his intention but he never returned he went with the intention of going for a while but he and his sons they went for the rest of their lives and then you see as so often happen one thing leads to another and they married
Moabite women and God had given clear instructions in the book of Leviticus in the laws that they were not to marry foreign women but that's what they did all good came out of it but they ought not to have done it if it's against God's law it's wrong and it's always wrong and surely the terrible misery and the terrible misfortune that befell them down in Moab is the final evidence that God was not pleased with the decisions that they made and that's the reality of it that's

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[28:44] God's word that is real and that's the sort of things that it speaks about and I think God in his word is saying to us perhaps if we use the catchphrase that I hear from time to time in some of the American shows on the television that say to us get real man that's what God's word is saying to us in these days get real and how do we get real how do we really live in this world as we are really supposed to live it's by bringing God's word into every area of our lives into the areas about our economic decisions into the areas about our marriage decisions get real man this is a real world that you're living in and the great reality of this world is this that it is moving on relentlessly to that great day when you will stand before the

God who has created you and the God who has created me and we will stand together no pulpit that day and that day there'll be nobody up in a pulpit and others down in the pew will be all there together standing before God and it will be all to do with the reality of our lives down in this world and how we live before God and were we right or were we wrong it won't be about questions about if it suited us if it seemed the best thing to do if it seemed the most appropriate thing to do it won't be to do about whether we lived our lives in a way that we really enjoyed it and we felt that we were getting the most out of life that won't be the main questions on that day it'll be whether it was right or whether it was wrong you see you may return to me and you may say oh you're saying it was wrong but but look at
Ruth look at the blessing that came out of it look at the good that came out of it yes look at Ruth but look at Orpah what happened to Orpah whose side are we going to take oh God is a good and a blessed God and he can bring good out of evil but he can choose not to bring good out of evil but to confirm that evil and the only way we can be sure the only way we can be real in working out is to get to grips with God's word and
God's law and work out there before him what's right oh I feel I would like to do it this way in my business dealings I feel it if I really just need to overlook that because there are going to be all sorts of problems for all sorts of people if I keep going straight down the line we'll just do a little bit of overlooking here or a little bit of overlooking there and it'll work out all right in the end well I've got to say it might work out in a sort of way all right in the end because God is a forgiving God and a merciful God and he may choose to use even your wrong doing to bring blessing at the end but you have no right and I have no right to make our decisions on what
God may or may not do to do we are called to make our decisions on the basis of what God has revealed in his word in his law we are to make our decisions on the basis that God has given us a conscience and God has told us to bring our consciences to his truth and we are to make our decisions on the basis of what God has said that anything that is against the conscience is sin and if our conscience as we bring ourselves to God's word is telling us this is wrong then we must not do it whatever the consequences because God makes so clear that we must not sin he will never give us grace to sin but he will always give us grace and power not to sin whatever the difficulties someone gets into a romance with a non
[34:39] Christian and says well I don't know if it's the best but look at so and so that was the way with them and they got married and now he's converted or now she's converted it worked out all right in the end well it didn't work out for Elimelech and Naomi's two sons and it didn't work out for Orpah she went back to her gods and that's the last we hear of her but the word makes clear that marriage is about the union between Christ and his church it speaks of a spiritual union in that context it tells us that we must not be unequally yoked together and we must do what is right and we must resist the evil get real

God's word is real and whatever is happening in these dark days there is opportunity for blessing for every one of us as we become more and more students of God's word and apply ourselves to living out God's law God's word is relevant God's word is real and God's word is revolutionary just a word about this as we close but that's really what we have at verse six in the midst of all this confusion in the midst of all this mess in the midst of all this unhappiness so that Naomi wants to be known as Mara bitterness even when we may be in a situation in our lives when we cannot see ever knowing a good way forward again because the whole thing is a mess at verse six
God begins to make his presence failed God comes near and Naomi begins to think she has heard that the Lord has blessed Israel again and she begins to think and she begins to see that she needs to make big decisions and we because we're not in that culture we perhaps can't realise just what a big decision it was but it meant turning it meant Naomi's life once again being turned upside down but with God's help it could be down and that's the blessing of turning to God's word if you will I

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don't know where you are this morning
Christian or non Christian I don't know where the word finds you in the midst of the morass of darkness of our present day but when you come to God's word you will find God himself there and you will find him able to speak to you just as he spoke to Naomi and it may take a wee while God has his own timing but as you persist with him waiting on him reading his word asking him to speak to you God's word is revolutionary it can change you it can turn you and whatever confusion you are in can be the beginning of new confidence as
God gives light in the darkness and as God turns you and as he says follow me amen time an name to him can

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