

Where you go I will go

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[0 : 00] to Naomi and then these words which we know so well for whither thou goest I will go, whither thou lodgest I will lodge thy people shall be my people and thy God my God and so on Can I just first of all a brief introduction into the history of this book the authorised version and most of our versions I think all of them include the book of Ruth just after Judges, it's not so in the Hebrew Bible but here the editors have put Ruth right beside Judges and quite rightly so because the book of Ruth is set within this period as verse 1 indicates and so in the page I have opened here in the pulpit Bible you have Judges in the last verse of the book verse 25 it says in those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes and then now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled and so you can see the very close link there is between the beginning of Ruth and the end of Judges that connection reminds us then that here we're dealing with a situation where there was no king we're dealing with a situation when there was a time that the people were doing right in their own eyes that's brought out in some way in Psalm 78 that we sang together as the people were led out then we were singing about how they strayed and followed after idols and this brings the psalm the history of God's people reminding us of these few facts

I think it was the last Sunday of the year I thought that this portion of scripture was appropriate because I feel that it helps us in a time of reflection as a year draws to a close it's often a time where we think over things and perhaps even as we start perhaps one of the things that we should ask ourselves as we reflect is am I like God's ancient people here who do right in my own eyes or am I seeking to do right in his eyes so even as we start the introduction there are questions of reflection that we ought to ask ourselves am I just doing right in my own eyes or do I seek to do right in God's eyes and this was the attitude of God's people at that time they weren't willing to have a lord over them they were lording over themselves they had no king and one of the faults and failings of many dedicated people is that although they're willing to claim

Jesus as their saviour they don't want that saviour to lord it over their lives and again these are very initial questions of reflection are we living as though there is no king in our time are we living as though there is no one lording it over us we want to do our own thing in this time of reflection then very briefly as we're permitted with our time I want to bring before you the four main characters very briefly to get a picture of what we can learn regarding each one Elimelech is the first person I'd like to focus on after a few minutes we see that as a result of people doing their own thing I believe the consequence of that was God's judgment upon them and as much as we read there was a famine in the land as you study a scripture famine and judgment are often linked together and I don't think it's chance and as Naomi later on in the chapter reflects she also puts this down the lord has dealt very severely with me and so on there are many indications to show that this was a famine just sent by God just as he forewarned way back in

Deuteronomy chapters 28 I think onward deals with the curse of the covenant and then later on the blessings of the covenant so Elimelech was faced with this famine in the land and what did he do under this test where the house of bread Bethlehem the house of bread was without bread what did Elimelech do in that situation well we read without consulting God in any way he left the house of bread for the house of Moab to Moab in other words he left God's path and sought his own direction he didn't take time to prayerfully consider as we have it in this chapter the consequence of his actions so these are things that we have to reflect on and think about ourselves and compare ourselves with Elimelech do we try to go our own way in times of trouble or do we stick to the Lord whom we profess with our lips you see

Moab in the scriptures as we follow up the references to Moab Moab stands for a place of rest if we were paraphrasing it today we would say that Elimelech went to retire in Moab he thought that this was a place of ease and rest and he left Bethlehem left God's way in his mind to seek a more secure surroundings a place of ease a place where he could retire to so this was a way of escaping in Elimelech's mind he went originally to sojourn as it says in verse 1 to spend a short time in that country but then verse 4 says he stayed 10 years in that situation so Elimelech here was a man who left God's way he went his own way he went to Moab a place of ease and rest he was a well established man we can understand as we reflect on these verses he was quite well off yet despite that he left

[7 : 35] Bethlehem and went to Moab we don't read of any other people leaving Bethlehem perhaps there was but the account only tells us of this one person who through that period of testing lost faith in God he forgot God's promises of providing for them and he lost trust and he put his trust in this country of Moab rather than in God in the time of famine and this was Elimelech and what we have to reflect as we think about Elimelech and as we compare him to our own lives is to ask ourselves questions to ask what do we do in times of testing do we try to run away from things do we cling on to God through times of testing or do we try to find the easy way out so this is a time of reflection thinking about

Elimelech but sadly this man who tried to escape death from starvation couldn't escape death because as he entered Moab and as we know there he died before as it were his time he sought to establish security he probably sought to establish more his wealth he was focusing in on these things that was the type of man Elimelech was he lost his bearings in other words he forgot his faith and I think as we look back and as we look forward we have to reflect on what type of people are we are we like Elimelech Elimelech the very name means Eli God Melech King my God is my king but from his whole actions we see that Elimelech wasn't allowing

God to lord it over his life and what we have to reflect is that we are saying God is my king but are we reflecting by our actions that he is not lording it over our lives you see we profess God as our king but perhaps we're wanting to go our own way perhaps we're trying to find an easy way out it's a time of reflection and you like Elimelech who professes God as king but for some reason you're not allowing him to lord over your own life so that's Elimelech very briefly to think about and to challenge your thoughts about as the year draws to a close can I pass on to Orpah now here we're dealing with Orpah secondly a time to reflect on

Orpah and to go through different things in her life she was tested by Naomi in her commitment as she wanted to go back with Naomi to Bethlehem Naomi quite wisely tests her commitment and what Naomi wanted to teach Orpah and I believe what God wants to teach one of us and remind us of and reflect upon this day is that when God calls us to himself just like Orpah was being called the message was well if you're going to follow me then this is what's required of you Orpah you have to forsake your own mother you have to forsake your land you have to forsake all and you have to come after me and put me first in your life are you willing to do that and that's the kind of reflection that Naomi wanted

Orpah to stop and consider what she was doing it was a very emotional occasion the daughters adopted daughters and Naomi Naomi had heard the change of providence and they set out back to Bethlehem she told them to stay and Orpah said right I'll come along as well and Naomi in verse 8 says no turn to your mother's house and I pray that the Lord will deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me she prays for them prays that God would bless them with a husband and she kissed them and they lifted up their voice and Orpah and Ruth wept surely Orpah says if we can focus in on Orpah surely Orpah says I will return with thee unto thy people so one of the first reflections that we have to reflect on in Orpah think about

[12 : 50] Orpah and what Naomi is through God is saying to us this morning if we are going to continue to devote ourselves to the loving God this is what it does mean it means putting him first it means at times we have to even forsake our very home for the Lord's cause and then another thing about Orpah is this profession of faith I will return unto you with you unto thy people here Orpah makes a commitment in verse 10 she says along with Ruth focusing on Orpah I will return with you unto thy people she says it and she cries so I judge she's making this decision quite emotionally and what we have to reflect upon this morning I believe as we enter into another year as we finish off this year is perhaps some of us are like Orpah who have professed yes

I will go with God I will go where God will go just like Orpah is saying and many of us are perhaps professing that but we haven't thought it through sensibly and this is what Naomi turns to try to make Orpah think do you know really what you're saying do you know what you're committing yourself to this means that if you go by what you say you'll never find a husband again so she really makes Orpah think and reflect about her commitment and I think this is something the scriptures here allow us to do this day reflect upon your commitment to the king reflect upon what it means he is asking you if you're going to commit your life to him to forsake all to take up your cross and to deny yourself and to follow him Naomi says that's what it means the Lord wants from you not just a profession that's made out of emotion but the Lord wants from each one of us a profession that's sincere outwardly many profess yes

I'll do this but as time goes on the commitment perhaps fails and what the Lord wants us to reflect upon is when we make a commitment to God it has to be a wholehearted commitment putting him first in our lives but what Naomi wanted to teach this Orpah very wisely I believe that committing herself to this king meant putting him first as a result of this teaching of Naomi what did Orpah do she kissed her goodbye these are very sad words as I read there when Orpah kissed her goodbye she turned her back upon the living God and we read she left her and she went back to her own people and to her own gods you see

Orpah had a choice to make either she had to commit herself to the living God and to his people or go back to her own people and to her own gods she couldn't do both and what we have to reflect upon is if we are committing our lives to the living God we can't do both we can't have the feet in both camps as it were perhaps Orpah was a bit like that she wanted to have the blessing but she didn't quite want to have the full commitment you see if we commit ourselves to his people we commit ourselves to the God as well it's interesting that Orpah in verse 10 says surely I will return with you and to your people they both said that Orpah said that she didn't mention God at that stage it's as though she was willing to make a commitment to the people and not to Naomi's

God so Orpah chose she said goodbye she went back to her own people and to her own gods and what I want us to reflect upon is this you see committing ourselves to loving God affects our relationships with people it affects how we interact with them it affects how we have fellowship with them God calls us if we are committed to him to come out from them and be separate and recently we were hearing to be light and salt in their midst that's what commitment means and Orpah had to learn that if we're committing ourselves to God it does affect our daily relationships with those who are in the land of ease Moab or those who are in the land of ease today it affects our relationships with them in their midst we have to be committed people in their midst we have to show whose king we are serving so this is a time of reflection this kind of attitude of Orpah thirdly

[18:37] Naomi now I'm just very briefly bringing reflections about these characters to you Naomi a few things interesting about Naomi the first thing I was thinking about in verse six we read she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the country of Moab how the Lord had visited his people first thing I want you to reflect upon is how Naomi is listening out for God it's as though she's waiting for news she's a stranger in a foreign land yet there seems to be this kind of commitment that she's still listening out for God this is a picture of what we must be like Naomi because often we'll find ourselves among strangers as it were in that company we have to be very attentive to what

God is saying Naomi first of all she's listening out and she heard what God was saying and it's very interesting this word he had visited his people this word visited is full of meaning full of covenant meaning meaning that God in his providence had visited them and brought about a change this is the vocabulary that's used in as much as reminding them that God was a covenant God but also it's a reminder to us to reflect upon another time where God visited his people and it's a time where I think of Zechariah in the New Testament and he in Luke thinks about the Lord visiting his people and he thinks about all that that means here Naomi thinks about the

Lord visiting his people the result was that he gave them bread I think this particular time of season is a time of reflecting on Zechariah's thought and look how the Lord visited his people and redeemed them from their situation pointing towards the one who was truly going to visit them and change their lives Naomi was thinking about how their lives had changed here and how they were redeemed from their famine what I want us to reflect upon this day is about when the King came when the Lord Jesus Christ came and visited us to redeem us from our particular situation Naomi reflected upon the Lord's visit and what I'm saying to you this morning is reflect upon the time where the Lord truly visited us reflect on the time of Jesus' birth the purpose behind it the reason why he was called

Jesus he came to save us from our sins so it's a time of reflection and Naomi reflects upon this theme another thing about Naomi is that she was a very prayerful woman throughout this chapter you can find indications of that prayerfulness and throughout that prayerfulness this led finally in verse 19 so the two went until they came to Bethlehem finally we find that from what she had heard moved her to action she didn't get stuck in a rut but she went out from where she was and back to where she belonged and this is a time of reflection and verse 19 so the two went they went along with Naomi who had heard this news that they moved on they got themselves out of their situation that they had got themselves into and they moved out of it and what we have to reflect upon is

God wants us to move out from the ruts that sometimes we fall into it and he wants us to get out from there and make a move back to where we belong it's a time of reflection God wants you to think well come back to where you belong come back to Bethlehem come back to the land of plenty the house of bread so it's a time of reflection a time of reflection for Naomi finally she saw that it was El Shaddai that he was intervening showing that he was the giver of every good gift so very briefly that's Naomi and finally we've only got a few more minutes to consider Ruth as I said it was just these four characters I thought appropriate to just bring before you and as you consider each one reflect in your own life and to see what you can learn from them and what we can learn from

[24 : 00] Ruth is her commitment that she professes in verse 16 because along with Orpah she confessed I will return with thee and to thy people but as she was moved on by Naomi she was taught what that commitment really meant and that's what I want you to reflect on in this chapter this day reflecting on what commitment to the living God really means it means walking with him where he leads us I will go wherever you will go where you will go I will go where you will walk I will walk she says to Naomi me but in singing saying that to Naomi she was saying that I also I believe to God we read of Ruth says of her she clave unto Naomi or she clave unto her old way of life Ruth clave unto

Naomi and in doing so she clave unto Naomi's God it was a commitment the moment she embraced Naomi there she embraced all that Naomi represented and when she said I will walk I will go where you will go she is saying that about her commitment to the Lord as well and her cleaving and it's a time of reflection yes I will go where the Lord is taking me whether thou lodges I will lodge it's a time of reflection about our walk have we committed our walk are we willing to walk in his footsteps just as Ruth was willing to walk in Naomi's footsteps that's the thing to reflect upon the profession has to be a sincere one that's what the chapter is trying to teach Orpah didn't after reflection she saw it was demanding too much and what we have to learn from the scriptures is it is asking of us a great commitment we have to consider what

God is calling us to think it through but then we have to make this commitment yes I will walk in this way and then thy people shall be my people after Ruth committing herself to walking in her footsteps steps she then committed herself to Naomi's people and it's as though Ruth from that moment was adopted into a new family she forsook her old family but at the time she did so she was adopted into a new family of God and you know what happened as a result of that although there was no king at the beginning there was going to be a king 1300 years later as a result of Ruth being adopted into this family because from her line the future king was going to be born all that because she was willing to make Naomi's people her people what we have to reflect upon this day is when we commit ourselves to God and his way we commit ourselves to the people that God served we adopt them as our brothers and sisters and are at one with them and then finally

Ruth says and your God is my God note the personal pronoun and she commits herself to that God until she dies and that was the commitment after much thought after hearing all that it meant Ruth said no this is what I'm committing myself to I know there might be troubles ahead but I'm willing to commit myself to this God even though it means death I'm going to commit this and woe betide me may God's curse fall upon me if my words aren't sincere and that is the whole point of this reflection this morning is to reflect reflect about your commitment and it's a time to really ponder as we enter a new year how much have we committed our life to God are we really willing to say where you go

I will go where you lodge I will lodge your people will be my people your God my God this is what God demands of each one of us Amen let us pray Lord we thank you for this well known chapter that you have preserved for us in your word we know there's so much teaching in this chapter that we have not covered help us to reflect in the time ahead of the commitment that you call us to Lord we pray that as we reflect on these things you would help us to feel committed to you in a way that Ruth was willing to commit herself to Naomi Lord forgive us then for our sins and faults and failings and continue to be with us now Amen