

Series: Marriage
Title: Where to Live
Text: Ruth 1: 1-7
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Before Rob and Kristyn married, when she rented an apartment near her work, far away from where the gospel is preached, far away from her brethren, it made me think of what needed to be the last message in the marriage series. But by the time, I finished the series, I forgot. Recently, I was relieved to see John and Kelsie buy a home nearby. So they reminded me of this message, so I want to include it now.

Subject: Where to Live

Proposition: The best thing for newly married believers, like all believers, is to live near where the gospel is preached and near their brethren.

Ruth 1: 1: Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. 2: And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. 3: And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4: And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. 5: And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. 6: Then 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 that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. 7: Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

Bethlehem-Judah means house of bread. It was in Canaan where God delivered his people and told them to dwell together. It was where God raised up his house where he promised to meet with his people.

Moab, on the other hand, was under God's curse. God told his people *not* to live in Moab nor have anything to do with the Moabites. There was no place to worship God in Moab, no brethren, only idolaters who hated God.

God gave Elimelech a trial, a test, by sending famine to Bethlehem-Judah while making Moab fruitful. If he stays in Bethlehem it will be difficult. He will have to deny himself. But he will be obeying the will of God. If he moves to Moab it looks easier; it looks like he will have a good livelihood; it looks like he will not suffer. Yet, he will be disobeying the will of God.

Elimelech knew God's will. But he reasoned by sight rather than faith. Carnal reasoning goes like this, "I know Bethlehem is God's house of bread but I can make a good living in Moab; I know it is God's will for his people to worship in his house of bread, to fellowship together throughout the week and to help one another when need arises but we can always visit to worship, we just won't be around to fellowship or to help when they need us or have them near to help us when we are in need; I know it is God's will for us to stay in Bethlehem but...it just makes more sense to go to Moab." So Elimelech moved his wife and sons to Moab.

Therefore, to bring his elect, Naomi and Ruth, back to Bethlehem, God removed every obstacle. He killed Elimelech, her two sons and let the other daughter-in-law go to her Moabite family. Then God sent the

gospel to Naomi that God had visited his people, giving bread in Bethlehem-Judah and God brought her back home.

Now, what do we learn from this?

THE OFFENSE

Elimelech offended God by moving away from the house of bread and away from his brethren because everything God did to bring his people together in Bethlehem-Judah pictures Christ's work of making his people one. Our gospel is the message of how Christ unites his people, making us one in him.

Sin separates. When Adam sinned in the garden, and all men sinned in him, sin separated us from God and from God's people.

Isaiah 59:2: ...your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

Christ our Righteousness unites. In the very end, when time is no more, God's will shall be fulfilled by Christ and all God's elect shall be one in Christ.

Ephesians 1: 10: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

So to bring us from the separation of sin to the unity of righteousness, before the world was made, God the Father trusted Christ to justify his elect to make us one body with Christ our Head.

Ephesians 2: 12: ...ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14: For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; 15: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; 16: And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

When he bore our sin, Christ was separated from God in judgment that he might fulfill the law for us and make his people one in him in righteousness. But there is more that must be done. Being born in sin like all men, God's elect must be given a new heart. So Christ sent us the good news, making us one in heart by one Spirit.

Ephesians 2: 17: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh 18: For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

So brethren, in our day, God's house of Bread is wherever Christ has established the preaching of his gospel in spirit and in truth and fitly united his people in his body in faith:

Ephesians 4: 16: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

We see the unity of believers after Christ called so many on the day of Pentecost. Scripture says,

Acts 2: 44: And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45: And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. 46: And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God,...

Now, together, our commission is to preach this gospel here and send it into all the world. The gospel will be preached until Christ has brought all his redeemed people into the *unity of the faith*. Therefore, after the Lord has united us, the Lord teaches us—not to separate—but he says—

Psalm 133: 1: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Ephesians 4: 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4: There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6: One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Since Christ gathers his redeemed and makes us one in righteousness and holiness, God's saints dwell together in unity in the worship of God in the Lord's house under the preaching of the gospel and in our daily lives. Throughout the week we fellowship together in each other's homes as often as we can. We dwell near to each other so we can serve each other in love and bear one another's burdens when needed. Brethren laugh with one another, cry with one another, pray with one another, build up each other in our holy faith. We stir up one another to love and to good works to not forsake assembling together under the preaching of the gospel.

So when Elimelech moved away from Bethlehem-Judah he counted Christ and his unifying work worthless. He exalted his carnal reason over God's word. He put more value on earthly bread than Christ the Bread. And by choosing to live together with Christ-hating rebels rather than God's people, he exalted the world over his brethren

Brethren, let's not make the same grave mistake that Elimelech made. I realize some believers put down roots far from the gospel and from God's people before God saved them. I have many brethren who have moved to be under the gospel and near brethren. Others are working toward it. Still, others desperately want too but it seems impossible. But what is impossible with men is possible with God. If we seek to obey God, he honors those who honor him. But for the rest of us, who know this is God's will, we ought never decide to live far from the gospel and far from our brethren. It goes against the very work of Christ who gathers us together in one body under his rule as our Head.

THE DANGERS

We see in Elimelech some of the dangers of deciding to live far away from the gospel and from our brethren.

One danger is often what we think will be temporary ends up being permanent. Verse 1 says he went to "*sojourn*." It means he went to Moab with the intent of it being temporary. Verse 2 says, "*And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.*" Verse 4 says "*and they dwelled there about ten years.*"

When I was thinking of moving here to be your pastor there were only a few families. So I asked myself, "Can I pastor this small number from now until the end, if God does not add to the work?" I asked myself this question because I knew it may be permanent. If we ever think of temporarily moving far away from the gospel and our brethren, we should ask ourselves the same question, "Am I prepared to live that far away from the gospel and my brethren from now until the end?" We should ask this because it may be permanent. God alone is sovereign. His will shall be done, not mine. So what I intend to be temporary may end up being permanent. (Jam 4:13-17)

Another danger we face if we decide to live far away from the gospel is that we put our spiritual life, and that of our family, in jeopardy—“*And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died.*” (v3) By moving away, Elimelech proved his profession to be false.

Many who decide to move far from the gospel soon begin to absent themselves from the preaching of the gospel. That is the first step to apostasy. Before long, they totally forsake the gospel altogether. They do not have brethren near to do provoke them and exhort them to continue assembling, as brethren dwelling together do. Scripture tells us this is what we need and what we should do for one another,

Hebrews 10: 24: And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. 26: For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27: But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

But even if we do not apostatize, when brethren absent themselves from the gospel and from fellowshiping with brethren it is so easy to become weak in faith. Naomi was so very weak by the time she returned to the house of Bread.

I have experienced this. In Arkansas, I grew up living forty-five minutes from the church building and further from my brethren. A long drive makes it more difficult to attend services. And you will not gather with God’s people during the week because brethren do not want to drive to your house and you will not want to drive to theirs. And both are essential! Hearing the gospel consistently and having brethren to fellowship with us are absolutely necessary for the believer. Brethren build up one another in the faith as we speak to one another about what we heard preached. Faithful believers provoke one another merely by their faithfulness in attending the preaching of the gospel. But without hearing the gospel consistently and without having the fellowship of brethren it is so easy to grow weak in the faith and not even know it.

Once Spurgeon visited a brother who had been absent from the gospel. As Spurgeon sat by the fire, he used the poker to pull out and separate a single, red hot coal from the rest of the coals. They went on talking. Soon Spurgeon pointed to that once red, hot coal that was now sitting alone. It had gone out. The man got the point. Brethren need brethren, sheep need sheep. We must not attempt to abide alone.

Three, before deciding to live far away, a husband should consider what will it mean for his wife and children if anything happens to him—“*And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons...And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.*” (vv3, 5) Elimelech left his wife with no husband to provide, no brethren to provide or even comfort her and worst of all, with no gospel.

But if we dwell together with brethren we do not have to worry about being provided for. God’s people are family—“*the whole family in heaven and in earth.*” (Eph 3: 15) God is our Father. Christ is our Elder Brother. We are brothers and sisters. Christ made this promise,

Mark 10: 29: And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, 30: But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life.

Christ works effectually in the hearts of his people through the Holy Spirit so that we are guaranteed that brethren shall provide for us in time of need. Believers are constrained by the love of Christ in our hearts,

seeing how Christ provided for us by laying down his life on our behalf. Therefore, brethren love brethren and are willing to lay down our lives to provide for one another. (1 Jn 3: 16-18) Besides that, a brother in Christ is the closest thing on earth a believer has to Christ himself. Christ says, *“Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”* (Mt 25: 40) So by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, brethren provide for each other.

A fourth danger we should consider is that when we disobey God by separating from his gospel and our brethren, we are teaching our children to disobey God—*And they [his sons] took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. (v4)* God commanded Israel that their children were not to marry any unbeliever in the heathen nations around them. But by disobeying God by moving away from the house of bread, Elimelech taught his sons it was alright to disobey God. If I do as Elimelech, I will teach my children the same.

And if we don't have children now, we should consider that where we decide to live today, will affect our children and their children. If we decide to purchase a home and live far from the gospel and our brethren it will mean our children will grow up amongst God-hating friends who do not know Christ, who will try their best to keep them from believing the gospel.

My grandfather was preaching works when God saved him. When he began preaching God's sovereign grace, the community in which he lived put in the town paper that he was a heretic preaching a false gospel. For the sake of his children who were in school, he was forced to move. But instead of staying near the church and moving his children to another school, he moved to family land forty-five minutes away. And it became permanent. That move affected me, his grandson. Due to that one decision made years before, I grew up forty-five minutes from where the gospel is preached and too far away to have any real fellowship with brethren during the week, especially young believers. I had no friends who believed the gospel where I lived.

Someone might say, “Well, God saved you even though you lived so far away.” Yes, God saved Naomi and Ruth, too. Christ shall save his elect and none shall be lost. But do you know how God saved Naomi?—*“she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.”* (vv6-7) God sent the gospel to her and she heard. Then she left that place and returned to the land of Judah. But it was through much suffering and bitterness that she otherwise would not have suffered if she had stayed in the house of bread to begin with.

And I can say the same. By God's grace, he made me hear the gospel of how God visited his people giving us Christ the Bread of Life. Then about ten years later, Melinda and I were married and living in Nashville about forty-five minutes for our brethren where the gospel was preached and we both were weak in the faith and did not know it. But like Naomi, God made us hear a word similar to what I am preaching to you now. So Melinda and I left Nashville and moved closer to our brethren in Franklin. And God blessed us with the fellowship of faithful brethren. But like Naomi, it was through much painful suffering.

THE COUNSEL

Let me end by giving you two words of very practical counsel.

One, walk by faith, not by sight. Judge what you should do by the word of God, by God's revealed will. If Elimelech had obeyed God's will and stayed in Bethlehem it would have been difficult. He would have had to do without things he was accustomed to. Yet, he would be obeying the will of God and God would have provided. We read of no one in Judah dying from the famine.

Believer, deny yourself—you may have to cut out expenses and pleasures. But walk in God's light and he shall provide in ways you never imagined. Not long after I moved from Nashville to Franklin, my job moved to north Nashville, even further away. But God edified me so much as I lived among faithful brethren that it did not matter. It was well-worth it to make that drive to work every day to get to fellowship with brethren during the week and to go to God's house with them multiple times during the week. And the Lord also provided a gas card through my job so it did not even affect us financially at all. God will provide. In case you need another illustration, when I moved to New Jersey to be the pastor here, our mortgage tripled, our taxes increased ten times and our income was cut more than half. But we have never wanted for anything. The Lord will provide.

Two, obey God by dwelling together with your brethren under the sound of the gospel and by living near where your brethren live. We need to experience a brother forgiving us to appreciate God forgiving us for the sake of Christ. We need to experience what it is to bear with a brother's sin to appreciate Christ bearing our sin. God commands us to love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us. But how can we if we do not live near our brethren? How can we bear their burden if we are not near to be there when they need us? We need to suffer together, to rejoice together, and to cry together. Christ supplies what each member needs by working effectually in each member in his body. So we need brethren.

And do not wait for others to invite you to their table, you invite them to yours. Young believers, invite these younger than you to go bowling or skating. They will open up to you and ask questions about the scriptures if they know you care

Proverbs 27:9: Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

There is so many benefits from living near the Lord's people and fellowshiping weekly. But it is like trying to explain to a man what he is missing by not being under the sound of the gospel. He has to experience it to understand.

Proverbs 27:17: Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Ecclesiastes 4:9: Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. 10: For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up....12: And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

May God be pleased to bless this word to our hearts and increase our love for one another that we might see how we need brethren just as we need to be under the preaching of the gospel of our Redeemer.

Amen!