



The call of Ruth

Ruth 1:1-22; 2:1-23; 3:1-18; 4:13-22;

Matthew 1:5

God's calls come in many ways. One of the most familiar is that which comes to us through one of our friends. Someone has said, *"I saw God in the face of my friend."*

Peter was brought to Jesus through Andrew

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). John 1:41,

Nathanael was brought to Jesus through Philip.

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." John 1:45

The call of God came to Ruth through her mother-in-law, Naomi. It is fitting perhaps that the name "Ruth" means "friend" or even "someone who refreshes another". Undoubtedly, Ruth was used to bring new life and hope to Naomi who was in very severe straits.

"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter". Ruth 1:20

The story of Ruth is self-contained. Her name occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. The little book is its own best commentary. Some claim that we even do it an injury in trying to comment on it.

Friendship through which God comes to us and is grounded in God can be one of the strongest forces in the world, overcoming all kinds of barriers. Here we have an illustration of the most difficult of barriers - that between Moabite and Israelite. It is paralleled in the New Testament by that between the Jew and Samaritan.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) John 4:9

or even Jew and Gentile - barriers which Jesus broke down .

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Eph 2:14

Examine the descriptions given of Moab either of its origin when Lot's daughters made him drunk, slept with him and the older gave birth to a son and called him Moab (Genesis 19:30-38) or in relation to Israel.

Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years. Judges 3:12-14

The Moabites were completely banned from Israel if the law were to be strictly kept.

No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. Dt 23:3

In spite of this, Ruth insisted on going with Naomi to Bethlehem in Judah. It may be that Ruth nominally took on the faith of her husband at the time of her marriage. Living in the same household as Naomi had reminded her of the worth of her faith and her God. Faced then with the prospect of entering into an alien and possibly hostile situation she made up her mind. The terms of her committal are worth examining. They are amongst the most famous in the English language.

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." Ruth 1:16-17

Naomi is addressed no less than eight times. It is a pledge of loyalty and love from Ruth to Naomi in all her bitterness, grief and loneliness. It is a pledge to follow the true and living God, to become one of the people of God.

Ruth's claim to fame is set down in the New Testament in the only place where she is mentioned - Matthew 1:5 i.e. as the ancestor of Jesus as well as that of King David.

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse. Matthew 1:5

Discussion

- Ruth followed Naomi's instruction about gleaning. How far should we be prepared to go in order to help support our family?
- How important is it for the Christian to be seen to do what is right? Can we learn any lessons from the story of Ruth?