

Blank Check

Ruth 1:15-18; 3:5

This morning, I want to take part of Ruth's story and compare it to some of the teaching of Jesus. Had she been living during the time that Jesus announced his 'kingdom was at hand,' she may have caught the attention of Jesus and received an honorable mention in the New Testament.

In the 70's, there was a very popular song call If. The band's name was Bread and the vocal was by David Gates, according to Google. The song began with the phrase, "If a picture paints a thousand words..."

What we can interpret with our mind when we look at God's creation can indeed take a thousand words to describe and even more at times. Describing the everyday sunrise or a sunset can be a challenge. But, we don't always have to use a large amount of words to paint a picture or get our point across. Painting word pictures with the use of similes and metaphors to compare or contrast something known or common to another object or person is a part of everyday language. They can be cynical, hurtful, humorous, truthful; they are a verbal tool we all use to paint word pictures with few words. For example:

No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.

For happiness one needs security, but joy can spring like a flower even from the cliffs of despair.

Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side that they never show to anyone.

Here are some I'm sure you have heard and even used: (Never to be applied to anyone here.)

He doesn't have all his marbles.

She's not playing with a full deck

He's one brick short of a load.

The elevator doesn't go all the way to the top.

The stairs don't go all the way to the attic.

If his brains were a picnic, the ants would starve.

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges. It is a simple, but compelling, story that is in contrast to the darkness of the times. The last three chapters of Judges tells the story of a

Levite and his concubine, a story reminiscent of the wickedness in Sodom in the time of Lot, and indicates the tragic moral and spiritual state of the Jewish people during this era. They had lost track of the Law, perverted the worship of God, and slipped into moral wickedness; a pretty grim picture.

But, no matter how dark it gets, God is faithful. If you look hard enough, you will find hope. That's the story of Ruth.

The story of Ruth reminds us that even in evil times living a godly life is possible.

Ruth is also an important reminder that, even though through the Old Testament era the Hebrews were God's chosen people, Gentiles like Ruth of Moab could find a favor with the God of Israel. Here is a summary of the first few verses of chapter one leading up to our text:

In the days of the Judges a famine in Judah drives a Jewish family to Moab. The two sons marry there, but within a decade the father and both sons die (1:1-5). When news comes that the famine in Judah has ended, the widow Naomi decides to return home. Despite the affection that exists between the women, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab and find other husbands (vv. 6-13). But one of the two, Ruth, is determined to stay with Naomi, and makes one of the most famous

pledges to be found in any literature (vv. 14-18). We pick up the story in verse 15.

¹⁵“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷Where 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.” ¹⁸When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

If a picture paints a thousand words, then Ruth paints a picture that could have come from the pages of the New Testament approximately 1,000 years before it was penned.

Ruth was willing to leave all behind and go with Naomi: Jesus asked this of some individuals; if they would leave all behind and follow him.

In Luke 9, beginning with verse 57 to the end of the chapter, there are three individuals who say they are willing to follow Jesus.

⁵⁷As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus basically tells the first man that there will be no amenities. He said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests,

but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Ruth and Naomi’s situation may have been getting close to not having any place to lay their head.

The next two individuals said that they would follow, ‘But wait.’ You have heard the sales pitch commercial, haven’t you? ‘You will receive all of this for only 19.95: But wait...if you order in the next ten minutes, not only will you receive the deluxe band-aid remover, but we will send you free a tube of our exclusive arm hair re-growth cream.’ Or what ever the product might be.

Jesus said that there is no ‘but wait’ when it comes to getting the kingdom message out. Follow me!

In Matthew, chapter 19:16, we have the story of the rich young man.

¹⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

The young man’s question reveals his motivation. ‘I am a good man willing to do whatever good thing that is required...’ He may have been looking for an ‘atta’ boy from Jesus in front of those listening.

Jesus told him to keep the commandments and even listed a few to make sure that the young man didn’t confuse the man-made commandments with God’s. He said that he had kept the commandments. “What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give

to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

If the young man was sincere with his questions, he just heard what he never thought he would hear coming from a religious leader. The Pharisees thought that wealth was a blessing and approval from God. Poverty was punishment.

Jesus had just pushed this young man’s buttons. He had gone from preaching to meddling. He found where the young man’s goat was tied. In this case, it was a golden calf that the young man was not willing to untie.

This rich young man’s benevolence was self-serving. God’s children are to do good to others because we value and care for them as God does, not to gain a reward. He was as far from the kingdom as the self-righteous Pharisees.

Many who had followed Jesus had given up all, including the Twelve. They would not go unnoticed, Jesus explained: ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

I believe Ruth will qualify. She may not have had any material possessions to leave behind, but she left everything familiar to follow Naomi.

Her willingness to do this paints a picture of the greatest in the kingdom.

In Matthew, chapter 20, verse 20, we read of a mother’s request. ²⁰Then the

mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹“What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

Now, you would think that a group of grown men traveling with Jesus wouldn't have petty issues like jealousy, or envy, or self-promotion, and such...that they would have better things to do with their time. But, you would be wrong.

When the other ten found out about the request that James and John's mother had made on their behalf, they were angry, possibly because they hadn't thought of it themselves.

The request allows Jesus to paint us a clear picture of the greatest in the kingdom. Rather than use others, as secular powers do, those with authority in Jesus' kingdom must model themselves on the Lord, and serve rather than be served, even giving their very lives to benefit others.

Jesus contrasts the world's greatness with kingdom greatness. The world's way is represented by power and authority. The ruler is over others. He demands that others serve him. He uses coercive power to force compliance. The ruler magnifies himself at the expense of others.

Not so with the greatest in Jesus Kingdom. The greatest in Jesus Kingdom is among, not over, others. He chooses to minister to others. And, in carrying out this ministry, the servant does not magnify

his own importance, but emphasizes the importance of others.

Ruth put Naomi above herself and exemplified Jesus message to his disciples.

Ruth was willing to leave all behind, put Naomi above herself, and kept her commitment through tuff times.

Those who remain faithful to the end gain a rich reward:

Ruth was not afraid of working hard, staring over in a new career, new land, and new status. She worked at a back-breaking and feet-hurting job in heat-sweltering conditions for mere leftovers, the minimum, odds and ends. She didn't consider it too lowly to pick food from the floor or the ground, to depend on people's good graces, and to live on grains and nuts.

She would rather work for the minimum than stay at home, wait for handouts, or stare at the wall or ceiling. Except for a short rest in the shelter (2:7), Ruth worked non-stop, on her feet, in the sun, as a picker the whole day: the whole season (2:23), for that matter; from the barley harvest in April till the wheat harvest in June to make enough for her and Naomi.

I am reminded of the Canaanite woman's devotion to her daughter. In Matthew 15:21, the mother of a demon-possessed daughter begged at Jesus feet for him to help her daughter. She had no intention of walking away with a half-hearted attempt on behalf of her daughter. We see this

measure of devotion in Ruth towards Naomi.

Ruth worked in Boaz's fields through weeks of the barley and wheat harvests. Her willingness to work hard and her dedication to Naomi had not gone unnoticed by the town's people.

In chapter 3, Naomi reveals a plan that may find a home, rest and security for Ruth. She instructs her to approach Boaz, and following an ancient custom, ask him to marry her as kinsman-redeemer.

Notice verse 5 of chapter 3. This is Ruth's response to Naomi: ⁵“I will do whatever you say.”

Ruth went beyond just being a daughter-in-law. She paints a picture approximately 1,000 years before Christ of the voluntary bond servant that Jesus told the Twelve they needed to be, if they wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Ruth was willing to leave all behind, put Naomi above herself, and kept her commitment through tuff times.

Ruth was a remarkable woman. She lost her husband of many years in Moab and her mother-in-law did not want her to return with her to Israel. Naomi urged Ruth to remain in Moab and remarry a local, but Ruth would not listen.

Having just lost her husband, Ruth understood how Naomi felt. Naomi thought

of her past, but Ruth thought of Naomi's future. It was not that Ruth had nowhere to go, no one in Moab, or nothing to do, but Ruth placed Naomi's feelings, interest, and well-being first before her own. How many daughters-in-law in their right frame of mind would give a blank check to their mother-in-law, saying, "I will do whatever you say?" Ruth said it and did it.

What makes a Christian a disciple is when they hand a blank check to Jesus and say, "I will do whatever you say."