

King or No King

Ruth 2 with Judges 17-21

What I want to do this morning is to further explore the setting in which the story of Ruth takes place. I mentioned last week that the last five chapters of Judges painted a grim picture of the decline of God's people, Israel. There are events in these five chapters that involve two families and illustrates the impact the slow moral decline of the nation had as a whole on individuals. The story of Ruth takes place at some time during this moral decline. We will compare the impact of the kindness of Boaz with the moral decay of his day and ours.

I like to come up with a catch phrase or a word that can be repeated or used to carry most of a sermon. This helps me stay on track while I am thinking through and writing my script. Also, most listeners are not going to remember much of what I say, but they may remember the word or phrase and then may recall the theme of the message or a scripture that was used. Most people will remember a funny story or an illustration and then be able to recall some of the message related to that story. Hopefully, the repeated scripture supplied in the five chapters will work: **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."**

It was difficult to come up with a title for this message. The reason being that there are so many that would work. One that was used in the lesson commentary was the opening line of *The Tail of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," contrasting the overall theme of Judges with Ruth.

Tales Of The Human Heart, or *A Gift To My Grandchildren* came to mind. Another title could be *Legacy*, or *Leaving A Legacy*, using 20/20 hindsight to contrast kindness and selfishness. King or no king works as well as any.

Here is a Psalm that describes the situation of the majority of the participants in the last five chapters of Judges.

Psalm 64:

- 1 Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint;
protect my life from the threat of the enemy.
- 2 Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,
from that noisy crowd of evildoers.
- 3 They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim their words like deadly arrows.

- 4 They shoot from ambush at the innocent man;
they shoot at him suddenly, without fear.
- 5 They encourage each other in evil plans,
they talk about hiding their snares;
they say, "Who will see them?"
- 6 They plot injustice and say,
"We have devised a perfect plan!"
Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning.
- 7 But God will shoot them with arrows;
suddenly they will be struck down.
- 8 He will turn their own tongues against them
and bring them to ruin;
all who see them will shake their heads
in scorn.
- 9 All mankind will fear;
they will proclaim the works of God
and ponder what he has done.
- 10 Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD
and take refuge in him;
let all the upright in heart praise him!

The book of Judges tells stories of the individuals whom God periodically sent to deliver His people from enemies and keep them faithful to Him. The final section, the last five chapters, during the course of events impacting these two families, there

is a scripture that is repeated four times: **“In those days Israel had no king.”** And two of those four times, in 17:6 and the conclusion of the Book of Judges, it says: **“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”** This scripture puts in plain words the impact of Israel’s national apostasy on the lifestyle of individuals.

Judges 17 begins the story of our first family: **“Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim ²said to his mother, ‘The eleven hundred shekels^o of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.’”**

The first family is an Ephraimite family. Micah, the son, stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother. When he heard the curse associated with his act, he confessed.

Stealing is bad enough. Stealing from family, from your own mother, no less. But, the story gets even better.

Following the confession, the curse was canceled by the mother’s giving of a blessing. Micah restored the silver, which was then dedicated to God by the mother to make idols for the household shrine!

“I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol,” mom said. Way to go mom.

Quick analysis before we move on: we have theft within the family; Superstition and fear; Worship of idols; Shrines in the

house, and abandonment of the central sanctuary. And, we are just getting started.

The story of Micah continues. Micah ordained one of his own sons to be a priest—again contrary to the Law. But when a wandering Levite, but not one of Aaron’s priestly line passed by, Micah hired him. **“Live with me and be my father and priest, and I’ll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food.”** (17:10). Though Micah again violated instructions given in the Law, he was thrilled at the turn of events. **“Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest”** (v. 13).

Have you even been guilty of counting your chickens before they hatch? Micah did. To make a long story short, a few Danites, about 600, stopped by on their way to destroy a Sidonian colony and rebuild it as their own. And they offered the young Levite a “promotion.” Judges 18:19-20: **“Come with us,”** (the Danities offered) **“and be our father and priest. Isn’t it better that you serve a tribe and clan in Israel as priest rather than just one man’s household?”** ²⁰Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image (that belonged to Micah) and went along with the people.

Micah pursued, but was threatened by the Danities and turned back. The Danites went on to the colony town, Laish, killed all the Sidonians, rebuilt the city, named it Dan, and the Levite’s descendants served

as their priests, ministering at a worship center using Micah’s idol.

And Israel had no king. Her Godly legacy lost.

The next story also involves a Levite. His concubine, a secondary wife, leaves him and returns home. After four months, barely enough time for her to cool off, he goes to persuade her to return to his home. After five days of hospitality by daddy-in-law, late in the afternoon on the fifth day, the Levite, his servant, and the concubine head back to the hills of Ephraim.

¹¹When they were near Jebus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, ‘Come, let’s stop at this city of the Jebusites and spend the night.’”

¹²His master replied, ‘No. We won’t go into an alien city, whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gibeah.’” ¹³He added, **“Come, let’s try to reach Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night in one of those places.”** ¹⁴So they went on, and the sun set as they neared Gibeah in Benjamin. ¹⁵There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them into his home for the night.

This lack of hospitality by the city residents violated basic Eastern custom. An elderly man, a temporary resident from Ephraim, offered them a place to stay.

²²While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who

owned the house, ...this is where the story reminds you of the situation with Lot, when the men of Sodom demanded that Lot's visitors be sent out to them.

The Benjamites wanted to sodomize the Levite. The elderly man begged the Benjamites not to do this, but they wouldn't take no for an answer. So the Levite grabbed his concubine and thrust her outside to the men. The Scripture reports, **"And they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door, and lay there until daylight"** (19:25-26).

In the morning when the Levite opened the door, he found the girl crumpled outside, her hands stretched out to grip the threshold—dead: unbelievable moral decay.

The Old Testament Law taught a person to love God and to love others as himself. Here was a Levite, who represented instruction in God's Law—selfishly thrusting his concubine out to a group of immoral perverts. Love for others goes out the window when you desert God's ways.

That next verse is even more unbelievable: 27 When her master got up the next morning...did he actually go to sleep knowing that he had a hand in the abuse of another human being?

And Israel had no king. It gets even better.

Taking the body home, the Levite cut it into pieces and set the pieces throughout Israel. Shocked, the people gathered to hear the Levite's report (which carefully avoided mentioning his own cowardly part). Shocked as much by the way in which the Levite had dramatized the event as by the act, the tribes angrily agreed to punish Gibeah.

When the men of Benjamin would not surrender their relatives in Gibeah, a civil war resulted. Many thousands were killed, and the tribe of Benjamin was all but wiped out.

And the Book of Judges concludes: **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."**

What a contrast to the story of Ruth. It almost seems impossible that the qualities that are seen in Boaz, Naomi, and Ruth could even exist during these times, surrounded by the moral decay seen in Judges.

The 'what's in it for me, all about me' attitude and actions of the two Levites, the Danites, and the Benjamites are such a sharp contrast to the words and actions of Ruth: (Ruth 1:16-17) **Your people will be my people and your God my God.**
¹⁷Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.

And Ruth is not alone in good qualities and actions in the story that bares her name.

When Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, the whole town is stirred by their arrival. The women recognized Naomi (1:19). It was the beginning of barley harvest. So once they found a place to stay, Ruth went to the fields to glean. Gleaning was the welfare system of that day and is still practiced in some eastern countries. The poor, orphans, and strangers were allowed to work in the fields and orchards picking what was dropped or missed.

Boaz noticed Ruth gleaning when he arrived at his field. He asked his foremen who she was. (2:5)

I might be making too much of this, but it occurred to me that by Boaz noticing a stranger in his field, does that mean that he knew all his harvesters and servants? Was he a land owner that took the time to know his hired help and servant girls?

It could be that Ruth dressed differently, being from Moab. Whatever the reason, he cared enough to ask.

Once his foreman told him who she was, Boaz made sure that she would be safe and treated with respect and dignity.

(2:11) **"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law**

since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹²May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

Boaz didn't realize that he was going to be the one the Lord would use to repay Ruth for her kindness to Naomi. The wings that Boaz refers to here in verse 11 are the same idea that is used in 3:9 when Ruth asked Boaz to **“Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”**

Naomi's plan to provide a home and a future for Ruth went beyond food, drink, and shelter. Her plan followed God's plan found in Deuteronomy 25, so her husband and her son's name “would not be blotted out from Israel.” (25:6)

So, what did Boaz see in Ruth that made him more than willing to redeem? It can be summed up with this sentence: **“All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.”** (3:11)

That sounds like something out of Proverbs 31: the woman or wife of noble character.

Well, we can't be partial or show favoritism with our last story. Proverbs has something to say concerning our first

stories: **“The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them, but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness”** (11: 5).

“The unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (11:3).

“Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a disgrace to any people” (14:34).

“The violence of the wicked will drag them away, for they refuse to do what is right” (21:7).

Boaz saw the action of Ruth that came from her character, as was willing to be her redeemer. But, there is a redeemer that is known as the heart seer. The redeemer that searches the hearts and minds, that knows you better than you know yourself, the one to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

The one that endured the extreme wickedness of man and said, **“Father, forgive them...”** he doesn't have to see your actions to know your character.

He sees your heart. He is not surprised by or ignorant of what is going on in your life; or in America, or in the world today.

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.” Will something like this be written about America some day?

Do you know families that operate like this? Maybe you come from a family that operates like this. Is that how you operate? Will someone someday say or write something like this about you or your family? I hope not. Someone is watching.

Do you realize that if you operate like this, that you will pass this along to your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren? That's what happened in Israel. That's what's happening in America.

But there is another way to operate. Let's change our sentence just a little.

In those days _____ had a King; and did as his King saw fit. Put your name or family in the blank. A much better way to operate: a much better legacy. Someone is watching.