

Good in the Midst of Evil

The delightful little story of Ruth shows that even in the midst of a corrupt and godless society, good can prevail—if we want it to.

“And Boaz answered and said to her, ‘It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.’” (Ruth 2:11-12).



The little book of Ruth is tucked in behind the book of Judges, almost as an appendix to that larger work. The events described therein took place during the Judges period (1:1), which poses a curious riddle. The days of the Judges were godless and chaotic. It was a time in which “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25), and the accounts of crime and debauchery recorded in the book are shocking. Life during this period must have been miserable for those who lived through it. Yet when we read the story of Ruth, we are struck by the piety, the kindness, and the general goodness displayed by all the characters. Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, the field workers—everybody behaved themselves admirably, and the story even has a fairytale ending, with Ruth and Boaz getting married and living happily ever after. How can we reconcile the social

conditions described in these two literary works, so utterly different, yet set in the same place and time?

The answer is not hard to find, and poses an important lesson for our own time.

Then, just as now, the guiding rule in recording history was “if it bleeds, it leads.” In other words, it is the outrageous behavior of the few that dominates the headlines. Criminals, tyrants, and renegades create a lot of mayhem, and hurt a lot of people in the process. That’s newsworthy, even in Biblical times. That’s what the book of Judges is covering. But the shocking behavior of the scoundrels overshadows the decent behavior of good folk quietly going about their business. In the book of Ruth there are no battles, no crimes, no heroic feats of salvation—just ordinary people doing ordinary things that most history books don’t bother recording. Yes, there was a lot of turmoil during those years, especially among the leadership. But among the common people a considerable degree of integrity and humanity remained. The book of Ruth captures a tiny slice of that goodness.

That same pattern is playing out in our own culture today. There is no question that the moral fabric of our society is coming unraveled around us. We see growing evidence of the forces of evil encroaching upon our lives, especially in the halls of power. But we mustn’t let the shocking headlines that we see on social media or television blind us to the goodness that continues to quietly soldier on around us. There remain millions of decent people going about the business of trying to be diligent workers, loyal spouses, good parents, and helpful neighbors. They get no acknowledgement for their sacrifices, nor do they seek it.

As you read the book of Ruth you will notice that the story revolves around two institutions: family and work. These activities constitute the foundation of every society. Boaz and Ruth devoted their lives to doing the right thing in the little corner of the land where they lived, and in doing so became the ancestors of King David, the leader that Israel so desperately needed to rescue them from the chaos of the Judges.

Family and work are the same arenas where we can make our greatest contributions to the Lord’s cause today. In a world that is going mad with sin, let us quietly do good as we have opportunity.

— David King