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Sermon Meta Information

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Sermon

Introduction.

- a. In **Exodus 20:3-6** we are not only given the second commandment which forbids the making of idols and then worshipping and serving them, but also the reason God forbids idolatry. The reason idolatry is forbidden is; *'For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.'* Many confuse *envy* with *jealousy*. The distinction between *jealousy* and *envy* is as follows: *envy desires to have what we do not have, while jealousy involves keeping what we already have.* God created us and as our Creator has an absolute right to the love, worship, and service of all creation. When a person loves, worships or serves another god, they rob God and give what is rightfully his to another. God's elect have always been very precious to the Lord; when they turn away from the only living and true God to follow false gods, the heart of God is deeply grieved and his anger provoked. The action of turning to false gods must be seen as an appalling act of betrayal.

- b. What has the second commandment got to do with **Ruth 1:1-2**? Elimelech and Naomi would have known the purpose and the requirements of the second commandment concerning false gods; they would also have known that God's people were called to be a holy people. The word *holy* when applied to God's people means *to be set apart in order to live God's way.* Conceptually there is no difference between being *holy* and living as the *salt of the earth and as the light of the world.* If we are Christians the way we live ought to make us *markedly different* to those who live according to the world. Elimelech made a decision to leave Bethlehem when a famine made life difficult, his decision was a witness to his family, fellow-believers and the Canaanites living in Bethlehem. According to **Ruth 1:2** Elimelech also made the decision to *remain* in Moab. From this we need to conclude that he and his family settled in Moab, he took the decision to make Moab his permanent home. This decision to stay on in Moab was also a witness to all who knew him. How are we to understand Elimelech's decision to go to Moab?

1. Knowing Elimelech and the dynamics of his family.

- a. Before we look at the meaning of the names of this family it is important to note that this family is described in **Ruth 1:2** as being *Ephrathites of Bethlehem*. Nothing is recorded in the Scriptures without significance and therefore we need to ask, 'Why are we told that they were Ephrathites of Bethlehem?' The only logical answer comes from the fact that Ephrath was the ancient name of Bethlehem in Judah. Jacob was travelling to Ephrath when Rachel died, listen to the account in **Genesis 48:7**, *'But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).'*' The families that lived in Bethlehem while it was still known as Ephrath were called Ephrathites. This reveals that Elimelech and Naomi were part of families that had a long history with Bethlehem. From **Ruth 3:13** we learn that Elimelech owned a piece of land in Bethlehem. Boaz who is described as a close relative of Elimelech was a very wealthy landowner. From these bits of information we can conclude that Elimelech and Naomi were important and influential citizens of Bethlehem. This view is supported by the fact that when Naomi returned to Bethlehem after her stay of about ten years in Moab the women recognised her, and that her return caused excitement in the town. **Ruth 1:19** says, *And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"* In **Ruth 1:21** Naomi tells the women of Bethlehem, *'I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty.'* When Naomi says she *went out full*, it means that her life lacked nothing: she was blessed with a husband, two sons and probably significant earthly goods. When Elimelech, Naomi and the family left for Moab, the town of Bethlehem lost a prominent and influential family. This fact makes their leaving Bethlehem a very public event that in all probability was the talk of the town for months afterwards.
- b. A name in the Jewish culture is much more than a label given to identify a person, the name often revealed the person's character or personality. Names were sometimes given to children with the hope that the child would be true to the name they were given. There is an old Jewish superstition that a child will take on the traits of the name given to him. Listen to the words of **Rabbi Kronh**, *The Talmud teaches that a Hebrew name has an influence on its bearer. Hence, it is extremely important to name your children after individuals with positive character traits who have led fortunate lives and have helped bring goodness to the world. ... It is said that parents are actually blessed with prophesy when naming their newborn babies so that they will choose names which aptly describe their children's personas and their destinies in life.'* Knowing the meaning of names in the Scriptures is important to the proper understanding of God's Word.
- c. The names *Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion* tell us a great deal about this family that moved from Bethlehem to Moab during the famine.
 - i. The name *Elimelech* means *'my God is King.'* It is important to note that the closing verse of Judges tells us that *'in those days there was no king in Israel.'* It is very likely that his parents named him Elimelech because they firmly believed that Israel was to be a theocracy: God was the King of Israel. In **1 Samuel 8:1-5** the Elders of Israel came to Samuel and asked for a King, citing the corruption of the judges as their main reason. Listen to **1 Samuel 8:5**, *"Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* The name Elimelech during the time of the judges spoke of submission to God and a commitment to do his will. The relationship between a King and his subjects strongly shaped the way they responded to God's law. We can assume that Elimelech grew up in a home where love and submission to the Lord was important. The passage gives us no direct information about Elimelech's spiritual life, but his actions reveal a man backslidden and in rebellion against Jehovah and his ways.
 - ii. The name *Naomi* means *'pleasant, lovely or delightful.'* Our imaginations do not have to work hard to think about a woman who has these very amiable characteristics. Naomi was a positive, friendly, open, kind and generous person, a delight to be with. We know that by God's grace Ruth was soundly converted. From whom did Ruth hear the truth about the Lord? Elimelech died before Mahlon took Ruth to be his wife,

so he would not have shared his faith with Ruth. It is safe to assume that Naomi shared her faith with Ruth and the Holy Spirit brought her to saving faith.

- iii. The name *Mahlon* means *sickly*. The name tells us that this boy's life was filled with sickness and that he probably needed medical attention often. Living in a home with a sickly child is never easy as the demands for caring often leaves the parents exhausted and distracted. Every time the boy coughed or sneezed it signalled to Elimelech and Naomi that another bout of illness was on the way. A farming way of life does not deal kindly with those who are sick and cannot help with the many physical tasks involved in sowing and reaping crops.
 - iv. The name *Chilion* means *weakling*. The name embraces physical and character weakness. Physically the boy was frail and easily grew tired; he was without strength or stamina. This was a son who was a follower, he would never stop to think through things for himself, and he had no backbone being weak willed. That the names Mahlon and Chilion are found only in Ruth tells us that these names are used to describe the characteristics of the boys.
- d. The names introduce us to the family and reveal a great deal about the lives of Elimelech and Naomi. I am sure that like all parents they loved their boys greatly and desired the best for them; however you cannot help but sense that they lived with a deep sense of disappointment in their children. Even though the children were greatly loved, there were times when they must have been a burden and a deep cause of worry to both parents. What did the future hold for them? All indications are that Elimelech died a fairly young man; does this mean that Mahlon's sickliness and Chilion's weakness of character came from Elimelech? If this is the case it means that Naomi's life would have been very difficult, demanding and sorrowful. If Naomi's husband and children were sickly and weak, then she would have suffered heartbreak after heartbreak as she cared for them. Elimelech would have relied on her to help him with the manual labour involved in working the land.
- e. Perhaps we can learn something more about this family from the response Naomi gets upon returning to Bethlehem. When Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem they are not taken in by family. We know that Elimelech still had family in Bethlehem, listen to **Ruth 2:1** *'There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz.'* Boaz was not the only relative for in **Ruth 3:12** we find Boaz telling Ruth, *'Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.'* A widow who did not have sons to protect and care for her returned to her father's house. If her father had died she would find protection and care in her brother's house. If she had no brothers, then her husband's family were obligated to provide for her needs. The general rule was, *Family are obliged to take care of family*, and this was the practice followed by the children of Israel. In **1 Timothy 5:8** Paul says, *'but if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.'* Scripture makes it clear that family members have a moral obligation to help each other. As returning to her father's house is never mentioned as a possibility, we must assume that Naomi no longer had relatives who could provide for her. None of Elimelech's family comes forward to offer her care and protection. This is unusual and makes it a very real possibility that Naomi was out of favour with Elimelech's family. Had she and Elimelech left under a cloud after a family dispute? It could well be that a family feud had influenced Elimelech to leave Bethlehem and then to remain on in Moab. We need to keep all these factors in mind as we consider Elimelech's decision to leave Bethlehem and go to Moab and then his decision to make Moab his permanent abode.

2. Keeping the Covenant was the highest obligation given to the Lord's people.

- a. It is vital for us to remember that God's relationship with his people is a covenant relationship. That God should make a covenant with men reveals the greatness of his grace and mercy. During the period of the judges the Covenant God made with Abraham was very much the focus. Listen to the Lord speaking to Abraham in **Genesis 17:6-8**. *'I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an*

everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.' Later on in **Genesis 18** God promise that Sarah would have a son, this promise was fulfilled when Isaac was born. When the sons of Abraham took possession and settled in the land of Canaan, they received the covenantal promised and blessing made to Abraham. Elimelech would have been reminded of the covenant God made with Abraham when his boys Mahlon and Chilion were circumcised. Living in the land covenanted to Abraham was a declaration of the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant. If the Abrahamic Covenant was about a son, descendents and land, then the Mosaic Covenant was about living life individually and corporately to please God and witness to the nations how great and glorious God was. The children of Abraham were to exalt his name among the nations, all the nations were to hear and see that Jehovah alone was God and worthy of all praise.

- b. The exaltation of God's name among the nations is a key issue of the covenant. In **Genesis 12:3** when the Lord calls Abraham to leave the country of his fathers, God tells him, *'I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'* The nations were to be blessed through the children of Israel living and communicating the truth of God to them. Everywhere the children of Israel went the way they lived was meant to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. What was the message the nations ought to have got from Israel? God deals directly with King Nebuchadnezzar to communicate the truth all nations were to receive from the witness of the lives of the children of Abraham, listen to **Daniel 4:34-35**. *'And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"* Failure to communicate the glory of God to others is a very serious breach of the covenant. Listen to the Lord speaking to his people in **Ezekiel 36:20-21**, *'When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name-when they said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.'* But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went.' It ought to be very clear from this passage that God's purpose and focus was not on Abraham's children but on his glory. The issue in God's mind was **not** how to make the lives of the children of Israel prosperous, comfortable and easy, but the glorifying of his holy name. What God's people say and do must proclaim his greatness, power dominion and glory.
- c. In the light of this, let's think about what Elimelech did when he left Bethlehem and relocated to Moab. Elimelech was the forerunner of those who would leave the land God covenanted to Abraham and his descendants of whom **Ezekiel 36:20-21** speaks. The message Elimelech's actions proclaimed was, *'God's people are not satisfied with living in His land and under his rule, other gods and their lands provide a better life for those who follow these gods.'* When Elimelech and his family arrived the Moabites would have said *'these are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land (Ezekiel 36:20)*. By moving to Moab Elimelech failed to keep the covenant and profaned the holy name of God. When Elimelech made the decision to remain in Moab his action said, *'I am satisfied with living in the land of Chemosh and under his rule.'* The sin of Elimelech was enormous, as it belittled God's holy name and totally discounted the Covenant the Lord made with Abraham and Moses. You must not think about the move Elimelech made in the same way you or I would move from one state to another or from one country to another. It is not sinful for us to change the country in which we live as the New Covenant is not directly linked to a geographical location. Under the Old Covenant God's people were commanded to live in the land he covenanted with Abraham. By leaving the land of the covenant and deciding to remain in Moab, Elimelech had broken the covenant and profaned the name of God.
- d. Elimelech would have known of the warning of God's word in **Deuteronomy 6:10-15**. *"So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig,*

vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant-when you have eaten and are full- then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth." This passage ought to have been enough to persuade Elimelech not to leave Bethlehem if his heart was right with the Lord but as we have seen he had a rebellious spirit.

- e. We need to indicate that God's providence in the sickness and weakness of the two boys made it more difficult for Elimelech to leave Bethlehem where family and friends would have been able to help his needy family. It seems as if he took a short term view of life, as he gave no thought to whom his sons would marry. Maybe his rebellion was so deep that he disregarded the Lord's directive that God's people found wives for their sons amongst God's people. Was the hardship brought on by the famine the issue that caused Elimelech to finally show his rebellious attitude in his action of breaking the covenant?
- f. We also need to remember that the Devil does not sit as a spectator, but is very active and quick to exploit any situation that would profane the name of God. What is the connection between Satan and the false gods? Paul in **1 Timothy 4:1-2** says, *'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.'* Commenting on this verse **John MacArthur** says, *'All false religion propagates doctrine energised by seducing spirits. False religion is the playground of demons.'* The power behind the false gods and the lifestyle they offer is the Devil. Satan has set up a great variety of false religions so that everyone can find a religion that makes them feel good. False gods and false religion are advertisements for the lifestyle that leads to hell. Satan makes sure that false religions are very appealing, very seductive and very deceiving. Satan would have been quick to encourage Elimelech to think that the Lord had given him a much harder life than he deserved. The Devil will not miss an opportunity to have you think that the Lord's provision is lacking and that he really does not care and love you at all. During the hardships of the famine Satan would have pointed Elimelech's gaze onto the prosperity and easy of life in Moab. Knowing sinful nature all Satan has to do is show us others whose lives seem to be easier and better, and our minds will soon think that the other man's grass looks much, much greener than ours.

Conclusion.

If you are a Christian then you are a bill board, a continual advertisement for the God you love, worship and serve. As a Christian you live your life under the spotlight, the world is watching you to see the commentary your life gives on the God you serve. Jesus has made you the salt of the earth and the light of the world so that they can see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**). What is the witness of your life to the world? Does your life reveal that you have been reconciled to God through the gospel of Christ and that you live by the power of the Holy Spirit? Does your life communicate the fact that your God is great and that living life his way is your delight? Your purpose and my purpose as believers, is to exalt the name of the Lord. Life is not about you, it's about God's glory, and about exalting his Holy Name.