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What is Real Faith?

Ruth 1:14-15

Prayer: *Father, we just want to thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you, Lord, that in spite of this virus, your church still goes on and we just continue to praise you and thank you for that. And Lord, we just want to pray this morning as we begin to once again to open up your book that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us as we open your book and that you would again make it of permanent value and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we were once again, we're back in the book of Ruth and just to recap what's been going on, a famine has wracked Bethlehem in Israel. Naomi, her husband Elimilech, along with her two sons have abandoned Bethlehem for the godless city of Moab. After ten years in Moab, Naomi loses both her husband and her two sons. She is without resources in a culture that has very little to offer widows. In addition she has the care of her two sons' surviving wives, Orpah and Ruth, both who are not Jews, they are Moabites. Naomi has decided to return to Bethlehem having heard that the

famine has ended there. Her daughters-in-law at first insist on accompanying her, and so she entreats them to stay with their own people and her daughters-in-law have two completely different responses. We just pick up on the story of *Ruth 1:14*. This is their response to Naomi telling them that they should stay. It says: *Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she, that's Naomi, said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*

You might remember the last time out we looked at Naomi, how embittered she had become at the difficulties in her life, how she had arrived at the false conclusion that God was punishing her for her disobedience in first moving from Bethlehem to Moab and then allowing her sons to marry outside of the covenant community. Naomi's also convinced that her misfortune is the direct result of God's punishment. And she says as much when she finally returns to Bethlehem asking her former neighbors to no longer refer to her by her old name, Naomi, which means pleasant, but now by her new name,

Mara, which means bitter.

This is *Ruth 1:19*, it says: *So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"* Well, Naomi was mistaken, not in the fact that calamity had indeed come upon her but in her understanding of where the calamity had come from and why. It turns out that God had great plans for both Naomi and Ruth. And just like God had said to Jeremiah in the midst of his calamity during the Babylonian captivity, so God intended the very same for Naomi and Ruth. This is what God said to Jeremiah. He said: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* One of the things I said about the book of Ruth and the advantage that we have is that we are now able to flip to the back of the book and so we can find out exactly what's going to happen. We see Ruth's future. And there had we see indeed the welfare that God had intended for Ruth. I mean if you go to the very back of the book, the book ends with this simple statement in *Ruth 4:21*. It says: *Salmon fathered*

Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

And as the book of Ruth unfolds we're going to see that Boaz is Ruth's future husband and Obed is their son. Obed just happens to be the great grandfather of David and that puts Ruth's offspring in the center of the lineage of Christ himself. This was the future that God had for Ruth. Matthew's gospel opens up with this verse in *Matthew 1:1*: It says: *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.* Well this is the very same David who was of the great grandson of Ruth. I mean Ruth the Moabitess is the ultimate outsider who becomes the vital part of the line that produces the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why Ruth went from absolutely nothing to this exalted position is really twofold. One has to do with what God does, the other has to do with what Ruth does. This morning we want to examine the role that faith played in the unfolding of Ruth's life and testimony. We want to examine first where Ruth's faith came from, secondly what it consisted of, and finally why we are no different than Ruth ourselves.

So first let's look at the where. Let's look at where Ruth's faith came from. Why is it that Ruth went in one direction and Orpah went in the other? Why is it the gospel makes sense to you and is utter nonsense to your neighbor? Where did Ruth's faith come from?

Well you know, years ago we were doing a study on the book of Romans and back then I came up with a definition of faith that still works well for me. This is the definition. I said, faith is a God given attitude characterized by a certainty of conviction that produces appropriate action. The very first part of that definition is something that we can see when we try to examine the difference between the reaction of Ruth and Orpah. The first part of the definition is that faith is a God-given attitude. See, the reason why Ruth went in one direction and Orpah in the other is quite frankly because Ruth received a gift that Orpah did not. God makes it very clear that faith is a gift. In *Ephesians 2:8-9* he says this: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Well the very nature of a gift is that it's not an obligation. I mean God can give a gift to whomever he wants and not a single person who receives this gift receives it because he or she has earned it. *Romans 3:23* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* And there's a huge difference between someone receiving a gift and paying someone something they're entitled to. I mean there's a huge difference between a gift and a paycheck. One you earn and the other you don't. And God insists that faith is not at all something that you earn through your behavior or your

good deeds, because he also insists all our good deeds will never rise to the level of flawless, which is his standard for good. Furthermore God says there's only one thing that virtually every son or daughter of Adam has actually earned. I mean there's only one paycheck that humanity is actually entitled to and it's not one that anyone wants. *Romans 6:23* says: *For the wages of sin is death, but then it says this, it says: But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* You see on the simplest level what the gift of faith is is the God-given ability to hear the voice of God. And not only is that ability a gift from God but so too those who receive that gift are themselves a gift given from the Father to the Son. In John 17 Jesus reflected at the end of his ministry and he's reflecting back in his prayer to his Father and all that has taken place during his ministry here on earth and he describes his disciples literally as gifts that were given to him by his Father. Jesus says: *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word."*

If you remember how Jesus selected his disciples you'll recall he just walked up to them and he said, "Follow me." He never asked their permission. I mean, he simply acted as if he was their creator and had an imminent right to their lives should he choose them, because he did and he does. We have a hard time ceding God

that right. We have an Americanized understanding of our own sense of self-determination. Our idea of rugged individualism puffs us up far greater than we have any reason to be puffed up. I mean if we take a step back and we look at the life that we've been given, we realize that we had no say whatsoever in any aspect of it whatsoever. We didn't choose our gender, our race, our looks, our location, our intelligence or our socioeconomic circumstances and yet somehow we think that we're responsible enough to be able to take credit for something as basic as our faith. I mean do you know if you are a believer God considers you to be one of his sheep? Sheep are not exactly brilliant self-determinative creatures. They're considered a commodity. Jesus describes us believers as sheep who have been given the gift of hearing his voice. And the fate of those sheep lies one hundred percent in the shepherd's call on them, certainly not in the sheep themselves. So the answer to the question of where did Ruth's faith come from is most definitely not Ruth herself. The reason why Ruth went one way and Orpah went the other is because Ruth was one of God's sheep and Orpah was not. The answer to the question of why you and I believe is exactly the same. We, too, are one of his sheep. The reason why God can say that faith is a gift is because the ability to hear the voice of God is a gift as well. If you have the gift, well then you believe the gospel. If you don't, you won't. Listen to what Jesus says in *John 10:26*: "*But you do not believe, because*

you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Well, so why did Ruth get the gift and Orpah did not? Again, I have no idea. I do know that God makes it clear that he makes those choices and that those choices are never, never made on the basis of whether or not it was earned. I mean there's a reason why I quote the Dane Ortlund every communion Sunday. It's because his quote so perfectly sums up the idea that nobody who's ever been in the kingdom of God has gotten there because they're somehow qualified. This is Dane Ortlund's quote. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." Every single member of the kingdom of God should be shaking their head in wonder as to why God chose to give them the gift of faith and not others, many of whom seem to be far more worthy than myself. In fact Paul in Romans 9 goes out of his way to make a distinction between two individuals, one of whom is blessed, the other of whom is not and it's based on nothing whatsoever but God's choice. Paul brings up these individuals in order to explain that God's choice of the Jewish nation was not a

failure. He's basically answering his critics who say what kind of God would choose the people who wound up crucifying him? Paul points out that simply being Jewish doesn't mean that you are therefore chosen by God. You see the unbelieving Jews of Paul's day thought being chosen was a matter of genetics and not the gift of faith. Paul is determined to disavow them of that thought and he insists that the only people who are actually God's people were folks who were joined to him through faith, not race and not heritage. And the reason why they had that faith was because God gave that to them, gave it to them as a gift, a gift he gives to one individual and not to the other. Paul points out that the only difference between these two individuals is God's choice by showing God making a distinction between these two individuals who are as identical as they could possibly be. They have the same parents, they have the same lineage, they have the very same socioeconomic conditions because these two individuals are twins. There can be no distinction based on environment here because it's absolutely identical for both. These two people also have no distinctions as to how they were parented or how they responded or behaved because the distinction is made by God while they're still in the womb of their mother. The fact that they are twins chosen by God while they are still in utero highlights the fact that it is God alone and his choices that distinguish between the two. It's in Romans 9 and Romans 9 is a chapter that most preachers love to avoid because

it shatters our view of ourselves. Paul is describing the fate of twins born to the patriarch Isaac and his wife Rebecca. This is what he says in *Romans 9:10*, he says: *When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls -- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* You know, folks get hung up on exactly what is meant by saying, *"Jacob I loved but Esau I hated."* I think at the very least we can all agree that what God is saying is Jacob was accepted and Esau was rejected not on the basis of anything they did or on who their parents were but that God is absolutely insistent on saying that he gets to make those choices and not us. God goes on to say in the very next verse, he says: *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

There's something uniquely American about our reaction to scriptures like this. Our first reaction is to think, well, how unfair of God to just arbitrarily decide, well, this one gets faith and that one doesn't. Well first of all, nothing that God does is

arbitrary. I mean if he chooses not to tell us why he makes his choices, he's entitled to that. And secondly, mercy is itself by its very definition is something that nobody has an inherent right to. I mean it's certainly not something that we are owed by God. When we start speculating about what we are owed by God, consider our situation from God's perspective. I mean God took on flesh and he became one of us and he lived a flawless life and then he went about healing the sick and feeding the hungry and even raising the dead and we in turn responded by slaughtering him. Not only did we strip him naked and hang him on a cross, we beat him first to a bloody pulp and mocked him as we were flogging him. And when Pilate paraded Jesus' broken body in front of a crowd insisting that he was innocent of this man's blood, we all of us demanded that his blood be on us and on our children. Understand, Jesus was not the victim here. He had planned his own sacrifice before the foundations of the earth were even laid but it played itself out as a reflection of the hatred that we creatures have for our creator. It was Jesus who said in *John 15*: "*They hated me without a cause.*" So when it comes to what we are owed by God, I would say we're on pretty shaky ground. And the one thing astounding about God's mercy is not that he's required to give it to everyone but that he has any mercy for anyone. I mean God showed extraordinary mercy to Ruth by giving her the gift of faith. God did not show a similar mercy to Orpah because there's no record of her coming to faith.

Now does that mean that God loved Ruth and he hated Orpah? I mean does God hate those who are not born again believers? Well, God's simple answer to that question is, no, he does not hate unbelievers. Jesus said in *Matthew 5:44*: *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* You see, you can shake your fist at God and curse him out all day and the sun will still warm you and the mountains still thrill you and the land and the sea will still feed you all because God set them up without regard to whether or not you're a believer.

So the question is not one of love or hate, but rather what type of love does God have for the Orpahs of this world rather than the Ruths? The simplest way to understand it is the way that I believe John MacArthur put it. He said he loves children in one particular way, but that he loves his children in another way. I mean loving his children does not preclude him from loving all children. We all know that the love of a parent for their child is different than the love that they might have for children in general. God's love for all mankind is present and attested to by the rain and the sun and everything else that God has put in place on this planet. God's love for his children is present and attested to by the fact that you're sitting here this morning hoping to grow in your

understanding of God and his gospel. You have chosen the pathway that Ruth chose. And outside that door lies a whole country that has chosen the pathway of Orpah. I wish I could say that you could take credit for that but really you can't. It is God's gift of faith in you that has prompted you to have that interest. In fact I think it's much easier to focus on the fact that God gifted Ruth with faith and apparently he did not give it to Orpah. So you might say, well, why even go there? I mean there's a reason why and I think this is it, I believe God is trying to remove human endeavor from faith because he wants to remove from us any possibility of claiming a right or entitlement to something that he gives us freely as a gift. And there's a reason for that. You see the gift of eternal life is not static, it's dynamic. It grows in value moment by moment infinitely through all of eternity. And for us to claim even a tiny portion of the credit for our faith would be to see that tiny portion grow infinitely as well. The last thing that God wants and needs or desires is us eternally preening like peacocks over the faith we exercise as if in some way God had an obligation to reward us for it. That's why God says faith is a gift, not of works, so that no one can boast.

So the answer to where does faith come from is one word and the answer is: God. Faith is a God-given attitude. And by attitude I mean a mindset. It's a conscious ongoing decision to cast your lot

with God and not necessarily with reason or even with common sense. Just consider the faith of Abraham. I mean it wasn't exactly reasonable or common sensical for Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and head out to no man's land at age 75 simply because God told him to in a dream. *Genesis 12* says: *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. You see, it was Abraham's attitude, it was his mindset of faith that made him righteous in God's eyes. *Romans 4:3* says: *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."* Well the same was true for Ruth. You see, as you examine Ruth's life and circumstance, you can see how radical her faith attitude was. I mean Orpah clearly made the decision that was reasonable, I mean, she was the one who went back to her people and her gods. Ruth made a decision that was not. Naomi had made it clear that without husbands or any means, there was no percentage in returning to Bethlehem with her. And whether it was openly stated or not, it had to have been clear to Orpah and Ruth that their outsider status

would have been a huge impediment to Naomi's successful reentry into Bethlehem. See for the ten years that they lived in Moab, Ruth and Orpah, they were the natives. I mean it was Elimilech and Naomi who were the outsiders and should they go to Bethlehem, that would be completely reversed, but now there would be no husbands to act as buffers between them and the culture that saw them strictly as outsiders. And when Naomi poured out her heart to her daughters-in-law, she was desperate, she was afflicted or so she thought, and she was also bitter. I mean she arrives in Bethlehem and she tells her friends that she's gone out full and come back empty. Well, she had gone out with a husband and she had born two sons and she was coming back destitute and bereft of family except for two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

And to fully understand what Ruth was going to find in Bethlehem, you have to understand the little bit of history that occurred between Moab and Israel. I pointed out last time that Moab, the founder of the Moabites was the incestuous son of Lot's daughter. And the city that he founded was ruled by the god Chemosh the same way that Jehovah ruled over Israel. Chemosh was a demonic god who demanded human sacrifice. I mean Moab was basically a stench in God's nostrils. And clearly the differences between Israel and Moab went much further than merely territorial. And the history of Israel and Moab varied from one of intense estrangement to one in

which the two nations basically cooperated with each other, and they usually had to do with Israel's relationship to God. You see when Israel was healthy, when they had a healthy relationship with God, they understood that an alliance with Moab was only going to lead to trouble but oftentimes Israel just didn't care. And again, we're talking about the book of Judges where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And so frequently Israel found itself at odds with God and were willing to make political alliance with Moab. So we're talking about a history that varied quite a bit depending on the spiritual, political and military situation at the time. But one thing was for certain and that was Jews were not allowed to marry, to intermarry with Moabites. Leaving Bethlehem for Moab may well have had been considered unwise for Naomi and Elimilech but it was not necessarily sinfully disobedient. Marrying outside of the covenant community clearly was. Ruth and Orpah represented a clearcut disobedience on the part of Naomi and Elimilech's sons and in all likelihood they represented a cultural transgression to the Moabite community as well. I mean in other words, neither party would have been pleased with this type of intermarrying. This is only to point out how radical a decision Ruth would be making when she decides to cling to Naomi. Again, the definition of faith, it's a God-given attitude characterized by a certainty of conviction. And here's where we see the birth of faith in Ruth. You see, Ruth's conviction has her clinging not to

Naomi but to Naomi's God.

Listen again to Ruth's plea to Naomi and see how little of it is based on Naomi herself and how much of it is based on Naomi's God. This is verse 15. It says: And she, that's Naomi, said, *"Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* But Ruth said: *"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."* You see, Ruth's decision to go with Naomi is just as fraught with terror as Abraham's had to be in launching out as he did. And as much as the Moabites must have viewed Elimilech and his sons as Jewish outsiders to Moab, so now everything's going to be reversed. Ruth is now going to be the outsider with absolutely nothing to offer a people who see her as a curse. So when Ruth says, *"My God will be your God,"* first of all she's no longer referring to Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, she's now referring to Elohim, the God of Israel. When she exclaims to Naomi that she's going to die where Naomi dies, well she's also forsaking something that in the ancient world meant you were connected to the afterlife and that is dying amongst your people, dying where you were born. All that she is

prepared to give up by saying she will die in what is to her a foreign land. And finally when she says: *"The Lord do so to me and more also, if anything but death parts you and me,"* there she actually uses the term "Jehovah" to describe her Lord, making her completely and absolutely dependent not on Naomi but on Naomi's Lord, Jehovah. And make no mistake about it, there was nothing about Naomi's attitude or conduct that suggested that she was pressuring Ruth into accepting her God. In fact there's much to suggest just the opposite. I mean after all it was Naomi who said to Ruth, *"Look, your sister-in-law as gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* Ruth's response to Naomi was an acknowledgment of the gift of faith given to Ruth directly from God. She had received the God-given gift. And secondly, it was characterized by a certainty of conviction that produced an appropriate action. I mean in this case it was the wholesale decision to abandon her roots, her family and her homeland in order to pursue her God.

Now we've seen first where Ruth's faith came from. Namely it was the gift of God. We've also seen what this faith consists of. For Ruth it's the concrete and appropriate action of leaving Moab for Bethlehem. Her action describes the difference between faith and mere belief. You know, if simply ascribing to a set of beliefs is all that's necessary for faith, then everyone who acknowledges,

well, there is a God who became a man and he died on a cross for our sins, well then everyone who just asserts that is a Christian. James says that that knowledge alone is not nearly enough to produce faith. In fact he goes one step further by saying that demons have that exact same faith. *James 2:17 says: So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!* You see, if we go back to my working definition of faith to say that it's a gift of God characterized by a certainty of conviction that produces appropriate action, well then we need to ask the question, okay, what is appropriate action? And actually it's here that we see a great error that often occurs in some denominations that draw a great distinction between belief and practice as if they're two separate things. Here's what you believe and here's what you need to practice. We don't see it that way at all. You see, the scripture is clear that when you become born again, God does a work in your heart. He removes the heart of stone and he replaces it with a heart of flesh, meaning that the old heart is gone, it's removed; it's replaced by a heart that is warmed and filled with a new desire to obey God and keep his commandments. Listen to how God puts it in *Ezekiel 36:26*. He says this: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I*

will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Now we define this desire by describing the difference between indicatives and imperatives when it comes to describing what genuine faith looks like. You see an indicative statement is something that indicates, that is something that tells you something that exists as a fact. An imperative sentence is a command. It's an order. This is not what defines our faith. As a born again believer in Christ we don't operate with a set of rules and regulations as if we are under some new set of commandments because we are now free in Christ. Instead of imperatives we operate under a new indicative. There's something new about our lives that indicates that God has done something here. The fact is we've been given brand new hearts. That is as born again believers our love and our joy is now obedience. Why? Because the Spirit of God is now alive and living inside us, moving us to follow God's decrees and keep his laws, not because we have to but because we now want to.

Peter makes that clear in his introductory letter that he writes to God's chosen people. This is what Peter said. This is *1 Peter 1:1*. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to*

the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. You get what Peter is saying here? I mean listen to what he's doing. He's describing those who are God's elect as being chosen through the work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ. Understand he's not saying because they were obedient they were chosen by the Spirit. He's saying exactly the opposite, rather because they were chosen, they were then filled with God's Spirit who moves them to obedience. Do you see the difference? It's incredibly important to see that. They don't obey because of some new imperative because they have to but because they now want to. Because God *will put his Spirit in you and move you to follow his decrees and be careful to keep his laws.* That's our new indicative. Ruth has had her heart of stone taken out and replaced with a heart of flesh that's now passionate about following after Naomi and her God. She had received a God-given gift and it wasn't simply an ability to acknowledge, oh, yes, Naomi, I guess your God's the real God. It was a faith that produced an appropriate action. In Ruth's case it was the wholesale dedication to relocating her life, her fortune and her affections to Naomi's country and Naomi's God. So where does Ruth's faith come from? It comes from God. It's a God-given attitude. What does Ruth's faith consist of? It's a certainty of conviction that produces an appropriate action. It produces in her

a conviction and moves her to forsake everything for that conviction.

Now the third thing we want to look at this morning is application. Why are we no different than Ruth ourselves? You see it's very easy to think of Ruth as some kind of exceptional being, someone from outside being welcomed into a new covenant community with exceptional things happening to her. What we need to see in Ruth's life is the very same unique covenantal love that God had for Ruth in our lives. I mean you may think that Ruth and Naomi and Bethlehem and Israel are all these ancient themes that are set down for our understanding, but what God wants you to see in all of this is that his care for you and your unique circumstance is no different than his care for Ruth. I'm absolutely convinced that we have no inkling of how astonishingly fortunate we are. I mean, I've said many, many times, you could be a thousand other places than you are sitting here but one of the reasons why you are sitting here is because, like Ruth, you've been chosen by God to receive an extraordinary gift, the most extraordinary gift ever offered to a human being, and that is the gift of faith. I have no idea why God chose me and not people that I see and know are frankly far better people than I know I am. I've known people who have had outstanding moral character who have gone to their graves feeling no necessity whatsoever to acknowledge God in their lives.

I look at myself and I know my own moral failings and I wonder why in the world would God choose me and not them? Frankly I will never have an answer to that question this side of heaven. Why did God choose me? Why did God choose you? I have no idea.

I mean we know the gospel story that God himself became one of us, that he lived a perfect life and then offered that life up on a cross in order to exchange his righteousness for our sin and that by placing our faith in Christ's sacrifice we now appropriate his righteousness as our own and stand before God perfect and worthy of heaven. I know for some that makes perfect sense but I also know for many it's absolute nonsense. God says in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* Those of us who are being saved acknowledge that it's by God's power and God's power alone, the same power that made Ruth see Naomi's God as compelling makes us see the beauty of Christ as equally compelling. And it's God's power, wisdom and grace that gives us confidence that when life turns difficult that our faith is genuine. And we have that confidence because we know we've received it as a gift, something that has changed us from within, something that has given us a brand new heart that now seeks after God. Now if that still sounds foreign or strange to you, then perhaps God is speaking to you right now. Maybe he's saying

something to you about seeking from him that very same change of heart. And if that's so, I usually say speak to our elders, speak to our deacons. Now I'd say shoot me a text or an email. Ruth said your God will be my God because God had mercy on her. And so we need to ask ourselves that question, has he had that same mercy on you? Well if he has, then that same promise that he made to Jeremiah, that same promise that he proves to Ruth is a promise he's still proving to us today. He says: *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* Let's pray.

Father, again, I just want to pray for all of those who wonder whether or not they have the gift of faith, who wonder whether or not they can just make themselves wish to believe something that they don't believe. Lord, here's where the gift of faith comes in. It simply comes from asking, God, give me a heart that longs for you; God, give me a heart that seeks after you; God, give me a heart that's not overwhelmed by objections to questions. Give me a heart that seeks after your kingdom. Lord, you can't ask those questions, you can't ask of God those things without God, you first doing a stirring work in the heart. So I pray each and every person that feels that stirring from God would respond, and that you would say, my sheep hear my voice and they follow me, and that you would have from this new followers today, and I pray this in

Jesus' name. Amen.