

Ruth, Refugee, and the Image of God.

You know what - I know we just prayed for the offering ... but lets bow our heads in prayer again... Father - There is much confusion and chaos in this world... especially in Europe and in the Middle East... and that chaos is slowly making its way here.. to our shores... We ask that THIS TIME... be EFFECTIVE... that through the ministry of your Word this morning... that WE might be able LOOK at the global refugee crisis with open eyes and open hearts..... in the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

So... like I said last week, this morning we are going to be talking about the global refugee crisis...

It is one of the greatest humanitarian crises of all time - with some 60 MILLION people... that have been displaced from their homes...

Never before in history have so many people been without a place to call home... Syria alone... a nation that is now largely controlled by the Islamic State... with a population of around 20 million... MORE THAN HALF of the population... have either been forced from their homes... or killed...

I share the numbers with you because...

I fear that most Christians are paying little to no attention to this crisis... or if we are paying attention to it, we are looking at it through the lens of POLITICS... debating whether or not we should even let refugees into our country and extend HELP... a myriad of reasons are given - safety concerns...OR the reality that we have homeless people living right here IN OUR own communities... Or the fact that the majority of the refugees are coming from a MUSLIM background - THAT IS ANTAGONISTIC to not just Christianity, but Western CULTURE in general....

HOWEVER, whatever the reason may be -and YOU ARE entitled to your opinion - the STARK reality is 60 MILLION people...that works out to about one in every 122 people alive in the world... is now either a refugee or have been internally displaced from their homes and seeking a form of refuge.... By the way... over half of the world's refugees are children... no older than Josiah over there....

that just breaks my heart... I'm not a father yet.. I dream of becoming father... but when I sit down and really think about that... OVER 30 MILLION CHILDREN.... Its not just a number on a page.. but 30 MILLION children... each and everyone of them someone's daughter or son.... and if thats the way I FEEL.. how must God feel?

But whats even more disheartening is not how the world is responding to this... with all their different opinions... but how the church is responding... or lack thereof... Most of us live UNAWARE to the greatest humanitarian crises of our time.... We live our day to day lives... we study... we eat... we hang out... and WE RARELY stop to CONSIDER... and PRAY for the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time... That takes some INTENTIONALITY! To choose to live INDIFFERENT to the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time... takes INTENTIONALITY! BUT, for those who are aware... and for those who have been following the news.... what shocks me is that they are RESPONDING from a mindset of FEAR rather than faith.

I mean... I open my FACEbook or I talk with fellow Christian brothers and sisters... and most of the time - maybe its just the people I hang out with - but most of the time, they respond with LINGO surrounding the END times..... OH, NO! Muslims are taking over the world! What do we do!

What concerns me with this attitude is that they seem to be responding out of FEAR rather than FAITH... I am well aware that prophetic literature in the Bible certainly lends itself to anticipate such a domination of the world... and that it is SATANIC.... but I want to argue today... and show you ... how that kind of ATTITUDE... DRIVEN BY FEAR.... is FAR MORE WORLDLY than it is biblical...

In a chaotic time such as this... with MANY voices and opinions floating around in the air.... we need to know how the Bible informs the way we view pictures like that... How the Bible informs us HOW we ought to RESPOND to a crisis like this....

So for the remainder of the sermon... I want to walk you through some select biblical texts which I hope and pray will open you eyes and your hearts to what is going on ...

First... I want you to think back with me to Luke 13 and 14... The past few weeks, we looked at the sanctity and dignity of ALL human life.... how ALL human

beings are created in the image of God.. and so, it doesn't matter how SMART you are... whether they are SICK or healthy.... OR EVEN what religion you are a part of.... WE ALL, each and every one of us... BEAR the divine image of God - and therefore, have VALUE.

And we talked about how to harm the least of these.... babies.. children.. the weak and marginalized in society... that to harm them is to ASSULT the glory of God... as John Calvin once said, "Every person bears divine image, and so when anyone is injured, the heart of God is wounded."

We also looked at how upholding the dignity of HUMAN LIFE is a matter of SPIRITUAL warfare- not politics. That is, to PROTECT life - AT ALL STAGES of LIFE - IS not something you do for charity or to be POLITICALLY CORRECT - but is a matter of spiritual warfare... In the past, it has taken on many forms - from Pharaoh to King Herod... the weak... and especially the children... have been caught in the crossfire in this war that is humanity's REBELLION against the glory of GOD....

What implications does that have to the refugee crisis. Simple - whether its a child... or an elderly man... it does not matter whether or not they are MUSLIM.... THEY deserve to be treated with DIGNITY and respect because they are created in the image of God. Therefore, to slander them... or to look down upon them in the streets... IS SIN.

Secondly, the Bible goes out of its way to EMPHASIS just how much God LOOKS after the poor and the weak.... does it not? God, strangely enough, often identifies Himself with the POOR and DESTITUTE.... And we all know that it says in James 1:27 - religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction...

Perhaps there is nowhere in the Bible that this is made MORE clear as it is in the book of RUTH...

The story of Ruth - for those of you who have not read it, goes like this... Elimelech, an Israelite, along with his wife Naomi and their two sons... are driven from their home land because of famine... and they find themselves in Moab... a foreign land - in the midst of a FORBIDDEN PEOPLE - Not just a FOREIGN people but a forbidden people.. it began when Lot had incest with his daughter..... and generations later, Moabite woman seduced Israelite men into sexual immorality, which resulted in the Lord striking dead 24 thousand Israelite men...

The message was clear. Don't GO NEAR THE MOABITES... Deuteronomy 23 - Don't allow a Moabite or any of his descendants entry into the Lord's assembly - even to the tenth generation!

But Elimelech and Naomi sons... during their time as REFUGEES in MOAB... their SONS ended up marrying Moabite woman... and not long after that, all three men, die.. the father and the two sons... and so Naomi returns to her homeland... begging her daughters in laws to stay in Moab. One obliges and the other, Ruth, follows Naomi into Israel.. and so, this lady - Ruth, a Moabite woman, finds herself in Israel.. desperate for food and family... Sound familiar?

Enter Boaz... the lord of the harvest.. Upon being told Ruth was a Moabite woman... instead of kicking her out, he seeks her out...He goes to her. He GREETs her.. shelters her...and then he does the unthinkable... He serves her and invites her to his table... and gives her lots of food to take back home ... Eventually, they end up marrying... and together, they have a child ... who will one day lead to the TRUE lord of the harvest and TRUE kinsman redeemer - Jesus.

SO why is this story in the Bible. At least one of the reasons is because God wants us to know that HE is FOR the foreigner and the stranger and the OUTCAST and the REFUGEE!

One of the key verses in the book of Ruth is found in Ruth 2:12 — as Boaz pronounces a blessing on the Moabite woman.. he says - a full reward be given by the Lord the God of Israel,,, under whose wings you have taken REFUGE!

Boaz isn't just a model of good-will in this story.. He is a MIRROR of HOW GOD serves the outcast and takes compassion upon the REFUGEE. GOD OPENS UP HIS ARMS so that a MOABITE woman can come and TAKE REFUGE!

This shows to us one thing for certain - that God takes great concern for the REFUGEES among us... Indeed, in one sense, we are ALL REFUGEES in this world.

Which leads to my third point.

3. If you are a Christians, you are AN EXILE. a SOJOURNER in the land... The Bible says that we are caught between two worlds... the NOW and the NOT YET... and while our bodies are of this world... our LIFE, even now is hidden with Christ in the heavenlies...

The Word of God is CRYSTAL CLEAR on this - and I've put up the Scripture references on the screen for you... OUR CITIZENSHIP is in HEAVEN! THIS IS NOT OUR HOME! Don't lay up treasure HERE BECAUSE ITS NOT YOUR HOME! We are EXILES... SOJOURNERS.... ALIENS - that's what the BIBLE calls us CHRISTIANS... We do not have a lasting HOME here and that is WHY the Bible says that GOD HIMSELF will be OUR REFUGE!

THEREFORE, it would be EVIL of us... to call ourselves Christians... and live as exiles in this world... while we turn a blind eye to the very real refugee crisis all around us... As Deuteronomy 10:19 puts it.... "show love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt....

Fourthly.... Its not just us. Would you believe it! Its not just US.... Jesus Himself .. while He was with us.... was a refugee.... JESUS was a REFUGEE!!! It sounds almost BLASPHEMOUS.. but its true!!! Jesus was a REFUGEE! If we remember.... Joseph and Mary were seeking SHELTER in Bethlehem on the night of Jesus' birth... even before jesus was born, He was in NEED OF SHELTER!

And shortly after His birth... they had to FLEE to Egypt.... AS REFUGEES - WHAT IS THIS TELLING US?!?!? God is identifying Himself with the WEAK and OPPRESSED! I CARE FOR THEM and I LOOK after them....I am a refuge for the REFUGEE.... And I KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO HAVE NO PLACE TO CALL HOME!

THEREFORE, we MUST reflect the goodness and kindness of our FATHER in extending REFUGE to those who need it.... Regardless of whether or not they are our CULTURAL or RELIGIOUS enemies.

5. BUT ESPECIALLY ALL THE MORE if they are. We must extend REFUGE to those that are our CULTURAL and RELIGIOUS enemies...BECAUSE it more clearly reflects the nature of the gospel....

Romans 5:10 - writes that while we were STILL ENEMIES ... JESUS died for us... so that we might find our REFUGE in Him... and not suffer ETERNAL punishment. If we BELIEVE that... and we extend help and kindness to even our ENEMIES - the world is going to STOP and ask... WHY? What is the reason for

the hope that you have - that you would LOVE YOUR ENEMIES and provide them with refuge????

So I just gave you 5 points on how the Word of GOD - NOT POLITICS, but the WORD of God informs the way we should THINK about and respond TO the refugee crisis...

we must extend help and refuge toward the REFUGEE because

1. Everyone is created in the image of God
2. God is a REFUGE for the weak and poor.
3. We are refugees/exiles/sojourners/aliens
4. Jesus Himself, was a refugee.
5. It reflects the gospel.

Now. I want to end by ZOOMING out.. we are going to take a BIG STEP BACK... from this chaos.. and mess... and get a birds eye view of whats going on... Because even after all that, our hearts might be TEMPTED to RESPOND in fear and not FAITH ..as this crisis undoubtedly will escalate...

So. lets step back and look... with eyes of faith at this ENORMOUS truth.... that is - the sovereignty of God... The sovereignty of GOD over ALL THINGS... Abraham Kuyper put it best when he said ... "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

As the King of Kings and Lord of lords, God is sovereign over ALL! AND IN PARTICULAR relation to the refugee crisis... God is sovereign over the movement of all peoples... God is sovereign over the movement of all peoples...

Acts 17:26 writes : And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place

So WHEN we see videos of the MASS MIGRATION of refugees - sometimes VIOLENT migrations... on social media.... we are INCLINED to respond with FEAR! I know I AM!! But the BIBLE SAYS FEAR NOT! GOD IS IN CONTROL! THAT much is CLEAR! God is IN TOTAL CONTROL over the movement of ALL PEOPLES.. when we read the Old Testament... we see how He

dispersed the NATIONS at the Tower of Babel... how He led the Israelites INTO Egypt and OUT... How He raised up NATIONS such as the EVIL Assyrians and the Babylonians to take Israel into captivity, and how he called the Israelites back OUT of exile ... and how He raised up the Roman Empire...

The more you READ the Bible.. and the more you study HISTORY - it becomes INCREASINGLY CLEAR that God TRULY is SOVEREIGN over the movement of ALL PEOPLES- INCLUDING.... the Syrian refugees..

By the way... of the over 20 million people in Syria, the vast majority of which are Muslim, nearly 7.5 million people are UNREACHED... meaning, they have never heard the gospel.... and don't have ACCESS to hear it within their lifetimes... if they were to stay in Syria. However, the refugees ... 7.5 MILLION from Syria alone - are uniquely situated to hear the gospel AND - religious experts note - ARE MUCH more receptive.... because of their heightened awareness of their need for a COMPASSIONATE Saviour that offers them refuge... - WHICH Allah DOES NOT! So there is a TREMENDOUS opportunity here!

BUT look it. It is not as if the Muslims are a special brand of people that are outside God's sovereignty. NO! EVERY Muslim is under the sovereign REIGN of GOD and they will ALL one day bow the knee to Jesus.... This war has ALREADY BEEN WON! And the movement of the Muslim people ACROSS the globe is NOT something we need to try to somehow PREVENT!

God is IN CONTROL!

And He is a REFUGE for us... and ALL who come to Him... regardless of RACE or culture...

Let me end by reading Psalm 2 for you.

Lets pray.