

Ruth 2016 1C

- For the past two weeks, we've spent our time studying exactly five verses in the book of Ruth
 - At this pace, we will require nearly nine months to finish this study
 - Have no fear though
 - We won't need more than seven months, tops
 - Seriously, our pace is going to pick up beginning today
 - In the first five verses of the book, we learned that the story of Ruth centers on a Jewish family
 - The family fled famine
 - Sought refuge in the land of Israel's enemies
 - And over nine years the family was reduced to just three women
 - We also learned that the story of this family is also a story of Jesus as our Redeemer and a story of how God deals with disobedient Israel
 - These pictures are embedded in our story of Ruth
 - So as we move through the story, we'll look to uncover their meaning as well
- For now, it's time to return to the story of Ruth and what's left of her family in the time of Judges

Ruth 1:6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food.

Ruth 1:7 So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

Ruth 1:8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

Ruth 1:9 "May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Ruth 1:10 And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."

[Ruth 1:11](#) But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?”

[Ruth 1:12](#) “Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

[Ruth 1:13](#) would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.”

- Approaching her tenth year in Moab, Naomi decides it’s time she leave this land and return to the land of her family in Judah
 - What prompts her to leave now?
 - It can’t merely be the death of her sons
 - After all, she has been bereaved of her husband for many years
 - In v.6 we’re told Naomi has heard news that things have become better back home
 - Specifically, she hears that the Lord has visited her people and is giving them food
 - The wording indicates that famine and drought have ended in the land
 - And more importantly, the people recognize that the arrival of better times is a result of the Lord’s sovereign will
 - That just as the time of deprivation was directed by God, so now is this blessing a result of God’s direction
- And as a result of food returning to Judah, Naomi decides to return home, but what to do with her widowed daughters-in-law?
 - In the culture of this day, a woman leaves her father’s home and attaches herself to the home of her new husband
 - In a sense, she is no longer part of her parent’s family
 - She has become a member of a new family, a new tribe
 - So when Orpah and Ruth married Mahlon and Chilion, they became part of the household of Elimelech

- Even after Elimelech died, these women remained part of his household since their husbands had received Elimelech's inheritance
- But now even their own husbands had died, leaving the women connected to a household without men
- Their family ties are very tenuous, almost invisible at this point
- No one would fault them for walking away from this family and returning to their father's household
- The future for any woman without a husband in these times was very bleak
 - These women would have few options for survival
 - They don't own any land on which to survive, since Elimelech was not a Moabite...he abandoned his property in Judah
 - And even if they did return to their inheritance, the farmland would be overgrown and unable to be farmed without significant effort
 - And these women likely lacked the physical strength or expertise to work the land in that way
 - They were likely destined to be beggars
 - Moreover, these women were unlikely to attract new husbands
 - They had already been given away in marriage once before
 - So they were no longer as attractive to a potential suitor
 - Much in the way that someone might prefer a new car over a used car
 - And this was especially true for Naomi, the older woman
 - At least her daughters-in-law were younger
 - If they separated from Naomi and returned to their homes, they had a decent chance of being accepted by another man one day
 - But if they stayed with Naomi, they would have few reasons for hope
- Naomi recognizes the situation for what it is

- So in an act of mercy, she attempts to persuade her daughters-in-law to abandon her for their own benefit
 - In v.8 Naomi blesses the women by asking that the Lord be as kind to them as they had been to their deceased husbands
 - So we see that these daughters-in-law were loved by Naomi
 - Furthermore, Naomi calls for the Lord to grant them rest from the trial and uncertainty of widowhood
 - Resting in the house of a husband is a euphemism for remarriage
- As Naomi first suggests this plan, the ladies embrace in tears over the prospect of seeing their pitiful family broken apart further
 - The young women declare they will not abandon Naomi
 - But Naomi will not hear of it
 - She insists they depart
- Then Naomi begins to engage in a little self-pity, understandably so
 - Sarcastically, she asks if she has two more husbands waiting in her womb
 - In other words, Naomi can't help them in their goal of remarriage
 - She will not bear more sons at her age, and therefore they have no reason to attach themselves to her
 - In fact, Naomi says even if she had hope to remarry, and even if she had two more sons, how could these daughters wait that long?
 - She ends her argument saying the Lord has gone forth against her, so who would want to have a part in that future?
- Naomi is giving these young women permission to be selfishly-minded under these circumstances
 - They would naturally feel obligated to stay with their mother-in-law, since Naomi would likely need their help to get along
 - But to stay with her likely means passing up the opportunity to be married themselves
 - So Naomi releases them from that obligation

- Her insistence allows each woman to make the decision of their heart
- What happens next is a reflection of each woman's heart

Ruth 1:14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

- Orpah decides to take advantage of the opportunity to abandon this sinking ship
 - She kisses Naomi as a final gesture of love
 - And she departs
 - She loved Naomi, but not enough to sacrifice her own desires
- In a sense Orpah valued a marriage to a future husband more than her relationship with Naomi
 - Naomi gave her the chance to choose and Orpah chose a husband
 - And her name reflects her heart
 - Orpah means stubborn or stiff-necked
 - Her personal interests came before Naomi's
- Then there's Ruth
 - At the end of v.14 we hear that Ruth clung to Naomi
 - The word cling can also mean cleave or joined together
 - The word doesn't merely indicate that Ruth stayed with Naomi
 - It means Ruth pledged herself to Naomi forever
 - Ruth made a commitment that she was going to spend the rest of her life in the household of Naomi
 - Even if it meant she never married...Naomi mattered more to Ruth than even the prospect of a husband or children
 - We don't get the explanation for Ruth's dedication in v.14, but we see it in the next two verses

Ruth 1:15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

Ruth 1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

Ruth 1:17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

- Naomi hints at the reason in v.15 when she refers to Orpah's path
- Naomi says Orpah returned to her people and her gods
- Naomi must have sensed that Orpah's allegiance to Moab went much deeper than merely finding a husband
 - She was drawn back to pagan worship
 - Elimelech's God, the God of Israel, had never made an impression on Orpah's heart
 - So when the going got tough with Naomi, there was nothing else holding Orpah
- But then there's Ruth
 - Ruth begs Naomi not to leave her behind
 - She pledges that whatever future Naomi has, it will be Ruth's future as well until she dies
 - In fact, she invites a curse from God should she fail to keep this commitment
 - Ruth has entered into a covenant with Naomi
- Ruth's reason for her commitment is to be among Naomi's people, the Jewish people
 - And to have the God of Israel as her God
 - We're coming to understand that Orpah isn't leaving simply because she wants a husband
 - And Ruth isn't staying simply because she doesn't
- It's much deeper than that...it's a matter of faith

- Orpah finds nothing particularly attractive about the Israel of God
 - And she has no affinity for the God of Israel
 - Orpah is proof that you can take the girl out of pagan Moab, but you can't take pagan Moab out of the girl
- And likewise, Ruth has become a worshipper of Yahweh
 - She no doubt wants a husband like any young woman of her day would
 - But she has come to realize there is something much greater than being married
 - She wants to know and follow the true living God above all else
- And most importantly, Ruth realizes that maintaining her connection to Naomi is her link to that relationship
 - Before Naomi came into her life, she didn't know Yahweh
 - But now she does
 - And if Ruth is to know more of the God she follows, she must stay close to Naomi
 - And so her love for God propels her to sacrifice her earthly desires to obtain heavenly desires
- I often wonder why Ruth wasn't included in Hebrews 11, in the "hall of faith"
 - She exemplifies the self-sacrificial love that faith requires
 - She passed on the opportunity for earthly reward in order to seek heavenly reward
- Based on her actions and her words, we can safely conclude that Ruth was saved by her faith in the God of Israel
 - While we can also conclude that Orpah never turned that corner
 - You can remember each of these women this way:
 - Naomi was the grieving widow
 - Orpah was the leaving widow

- And Ruth was the cleaving widow

[Ruth 1:18](#) When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

[Ruth 1:19](#) So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

[Ruth 1:20](#) She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[Ruth 1:21](#) "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

[Ruth 1:22](#) So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- Naomi relents and allows Ruth to accompany her, no doubt with a measure of relief
 - She will be glad to have the company and the support
 - And it will be a source of encouragement to hear that Ruth was committed to her despite the sacrifice required
 - This is the biblical definition of love
 - To sacrifice one's own interests for the needs of another
 - Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends
 - Perhaps that's why the name Ruth means friendship
- So Naomi and Ruth head back to Bethlehem
 - And as Naomi arrives, she is greeted by those who remember her family
 - They are astonished to see her again
 - They must have assumed that the family of Elimelech was lost forever
 - Perhaps they heard how the family had fallen on hard times while in Moab
 - As they greet Naomi, she responds by asking them to call her by a new name
 - Her name was Naomi, which means pleasant Jewish wife

- But she asks that they call her Mara, meaning bitter
- Naomi is bitter against the Lord for her misery and loss
- But remember, her family suffered as a result of a chain of sin, not as the result of a cruel god
 - Their story began with the sin of Israel disobeying the Lord and breaking His covenant
 - That prompted God's response of judgment, leading to the family's choice to abandon their land during the famine, another sin
 - And their sin continued with the sons' decisions to marry Moabites while outside the land
- So Naomi may be bitter toward the Lord, but it wasn't the Lord's fault
 - Naomi spent 9 years outside the land during a period of judgment
 - But even then, the Lord has remained faithful to her
 - That's why she is now back in her land to begin a time of testimony
 - How ironic that even as she returns from exile, she's still harboring resentment against God for her situation
- Naomi even adds that she left "full" and has returned empty
 - In reality the situation is exactly the opposite
 - She left in a famine, but she is returning to a land of plenty
 - She left with three men who were intent on disobeying the Lord and serving only their own selfish interests
 - She returns accompanied by a devoted daughter who is faithfully following her and Yahweh
 - The truth is Naomi has never had it so good
- Her situation at the end of chapter 1 is a classic representation of how the child of God can be persecuted, deprived, and hated by the world and yet blessed by God

- If we measure our circumstances in earthly, worldly terms, we will also find reason to be bitter
 - Our Lord Himself said that those who follow Him will know the same rejection and persecution He knew before us

Matt. 10:24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.

Matt. 10:25 "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

- And Paul reminded us that our faith in Christ has made us enemies with the world, as it was from the beginning

Gal. 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Gal. 4:29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

- That's why we have to live with spiritual understanding, with eyes for eternity
 - We need to realize that we can't let our happiness be determined by earthly matters
 - Because the Word of God has already disclosed that the life of a Christian will mirror that of our Lord
 - We will suffer at the hands of hateful men and see trial and testing from the Father, just as Jesus did
- Therefore, we let our joy come from knowing we are assured of glory in our heavenly state
 - We will have eternal reward, an inheritance in this earth that God appoints and no one can take from us
 - And we will enjoy that inheritance in a glorified body that can never die or suffer again
 - In light of that future, how can we dwell on the present suffering?
 - As Paul declared:

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

- Naomi had her eyes down when she returned from Moab
 - They were looking on her earthly circumstances, not her heavenly position
 - Yes, her situation was difficult and we too would likely be mourning in her place
 - But there is a difference between mourning and bitterness
 - Naomi is bitter because she can't see past her circumstances
 - She needed to lift her eyes heavenward and consider what God was doing around her
- That's our challenge as well
 - Our challenge is to look past this world and consider the one to come
 - We aren't to pretend everything is fine on earth, because it won't be
 - But we are to see life's travails with an eternal perspective
 - To remember that nothing we lose here matters when we stand to gain so much in eternity
 - But this isn't a perspective we can obtain as a result of a single sermon or through the power of positive thinking
 - It comes naturally as we mature spiritually
 - Spend time in God's word, consider the example of the saints who have gone before you
 - Follow the example of the Lord
 - The more the word of God influences your thinking, the less you will care about the world that is passing away
- Next time, we return to this chapter one last time to consider Naomi and Ruth in the second story, of Israel and Jehovah