

Ruth Series #1 "The Path of Faith" - Ruth 1:16-17

INTRODUCTION

While Benjamin Franklin was ambassador to France he had frequent meetings with French philosophers and intellectuals. These men, following the intellectual fashion of the day, were skeptics of the bible and the Christian faith. They delighted in ridiculing Franklin's belief in holy scripture. Franklin was convinced they had never read the bible themselves, but were merely parroting the popular ideas of their day

So one evening, he asked them if he could read to them a most intriguing story he had discovered. He pulled a hand-written copy of the Book of Ruth out of his pocket and proceeded to read it, not telling them it's true origin. When he concluded his audience was ecstatic. They said, "That is the greatest love story we have ever heard. You musty publish it at once." He waited for the uproar to subside then said, "It's already been published. It's in the Bible." The scoffers were silenced.

Truly, in all the literature of man, there is no love story more touching than the Book of Ruth. Though only 4 short chapters and 85 verse long, it's message is one of the most profound to ever be penned. It is our privilege to study Ruth over the next few weeks.

TEXT

{1} Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges. This was a dark time in Israel, a time of idolatry, sin, rebellion, a time of brutality, perversion and great injustice. It is against this backdrop that the book of Ruth is set.

If you visit a fine jewelry store, the salesperson will likely use a piece of black velvet as a background to show you a piece of jewelry. The gold and gems stand out more vividly against a black backdrop than if they were simply to be suspended over open air. The story of Ruth is like a fine diamond set over the darkness of the time of the Judges. It sparkles more intensely when seen against the wicked days of rebellious Israel. And the story reminds us that while it seems all the world is going to hell, God still works quietly to accomplish His will. On the larger stage of history, while most of Israel had turned from God to idols, and nation after nation was attacking her and putting her under cruel oppression, God had not left Himself without a witness. In a small corner of Judah he had a family that loved and followed Him.

If there were newspapers published at that time they would have taken no notice of this family of four as they made their way to Moab. They would have reported on the latest events on the national scene. Their stories would have been on the famine, or on the

prospects for another raid by the Ammorites. But in God's economy, the story of Ruth is the real story.

Our day is very much like the time of the Judges. There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Even so today, there is no sense of respect for the authority of government or of Christ as King. The moral standard of God's unchanging word has been dethroned and now everyone is doing what seems right in their own eyes. (Note to pastors: We covered Judges before this story in Ruth) It is very easy for us to become so discouraged by the moral darkness around us that we despair of hope. Please know that God has not left Himself without a witness. He is working quietly in spite of the darkness and perversions of our day. You see friends, no matter how dark it gets, we have this promise _ Our God wins!!! No matter what man does, no matter what the devil tries, God gets the final victory. Nothing can thwart His purpose or plan. Take heart, be of good cheer _ Christ has overcome the world, and has given His promise that we too shall overcome. (John 16:33)

There is a painting in an art museum in Europe. It pictures a dark, storm tossed seascape. There are great, roaring waves crashing on a ragged and rocky shore. Lightning splits the sky, tearing holes in the night. The title of the painting is Peace. Most people think it is horribly misnamed and walk away scratching their heads. But they fail to notice something; in the bottom right corner, nestled in a hollow of one of the rocks on the shore is a small bird. It is safe, warm, and secure in the cleft of the rock. Our world is in turmoil. It seems the storms of life are crashing on many of our heads. Yet we can be safe and secure in the peace of the Prince of peace, the Rock of our salvation = Jesus.

THE STORY

The man's name is Elimelech and he is married to a gal named Naomi. They have two kids, Mahlon and Chilion. Because there is famine in Bethlehem, they travel to Moab, where they have heard there is food. They live there for a total of ten years. Mahlon and Chilion marry a couple Moabite girls, named Orpah and Ruth. Then, Elimelech died, as do both Mahlon and Chilion. Word reaches Naomi that the famine at her home in Bethlehem is over, so she decides to return. At first, both her daughters in law say they want to go with her. But Naomi knows that she is going home an empty woman and that the prospect of re-marriage for two Moabite girls in Israel is not good at all. So she tries to convince them to stay in Moab where it will be a lot easier for them to re-marry.

Orpah decides to stay, but Ruth cleaves to Naomi and refuses to depart. She has come to love her mother in law, and in some of the most poignant words ever to be spoken or penned she said . . .

{16} 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.

{17} 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."

Clearly, Ruth had come to love Naomi. Think of what Ruth would

be giving up to go with her. She would be leaving her home, family, friends. She would be leaving her own people, the Moabites, to go live with a group of foreigners, and enemies at that! She would be turning her back on her gods, and so on her whole way of looking at the world.

Ruth had seen something in the family of Elimelech that drew her to the God of Israel. This was nothing less than a religious conversion she was making. And notice how complete that conversion was.

"Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God." Naomi knew that she belonged with her own people. God had given the Jews the land of Canaan, not Moab. She knew that she must return there. Her husband had taken her out of the land of promise to Moab during a time of plague. But really, they never should have left Bethlehem. They should have stayed and trusted in the Lord. Now that Naomi has lost everything, she turns back toward home. She is a prodigal daughter going home. Faith makes her pick up from where she is to move to the place God directs. And Ruth begins that trip of faith with her.

True faith always results in movement away from our sinful past _ toward God. For Naomi it meant a return to the place God had given. For Ruth it meant a leaving of her present life to begin the pilgrimage to the place of God's promise. So it is for us as well. When someone comes to faith in Christ, we often lead them in something called the sinner's prayer. But really, aren't Ruth's words in these verses a perfect model for the prayer of someone who is giving their life to Christ?

"Wherever you go, I will go." Lord, you are the director and God of my life. No more will I take my direction and cues from the world. You are my light and my life, I will follow you.

"Wherever you lodge, I will lodge." Lord, I want to live with You. I want my daily life to be filled with the sense of Your presence. I want to be at home with you and dwell in Your presence all the days of my life.

"Your people shall be my people." Lord, I want to be a part of Your family. I want to enter in to the fullness of fellowship with others who call on Your name out of a pure heart.

"And your God, my God." Lord Jesus, I long to know the Father. I want to worship Him and praise Him. I want to turn away from the idols of my imagination and embrace the true and living God.

Ruth's words reveal the path of faith. For her, they began in Moab and led on unseen trials to Bethlehem. For us, the path of faith begins in this world and leads by unseen trails to heaven. But what is vitally important to notice about Ruth's words is that they were motivated by love. The Path of Faith was also the path of love.

Jesus does not want our faith to be some dry, lifeless, intellectual agreement with a set of doctrines. He wants our faith to be a loving and natural response to Him. Take for instance my marriage to my lovely wife, Lynn. If someone asks me to describe my wife and our marriage, I don't put on a dead pan face and say [Pastors - I put on a dead pan face and drop to a monotone and describe my wife in dispassionate facts. I describe her appearance, our daily routine, etc. this takes m,aybe, 45 seconds.] No! Since I love her, I'm going to describe her in passionate terms of

relationship!!!! [Pastors - here, I adopt a big smile and with great intensity say, "Hey, let me tell you about my wife. I LOVE HER!!! She is totally awesome. The only woman who could put up with me and act like shes' enjoying it at the same time." etc.]

When someone asks you about your faith, what do you say? Do you give a dry, technical description of doctrines? Or is your faith a love relationship with the King of Creation? And what do you think is going to be more effective in drawing people to God?

CONCLUSION

Finally, notice that Ruth's commitment was complete. She didn't make any reservations or limit it in any way. She said, "Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried." She wasn't thinking that she would give Bethlehem a try for a while but if things didn't work out she'd jump on the nearest camel and high tail it back to Moab. Her commitment was a life commitment.

You know what, Ruth had faith in heroic proportions. Again, think of what she was leaving behind; family, friends, her own people, everything she knew was being left behind. And all that lay before her was a dark and uncertain future.

I want to quote Alexander MacLaren at length as he comments on this passage. "Put the sweet figure of the Moabite woman beside the heroes of the Book of Judges, and we feel a great contrast. But is there anything in the pages of Judges more truly heroic than her deed, as she turned her back on the blue hills of Moab, and chose the joyless lot of the widowed companion of a widow, aged and poor, in a land of strangers, the enemies of her country and its gods? It is easier far to rush on the spears of the foe, amid the whirl and excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes so dreary a lifelong path. The gentleness of a true woman covers a courage of the patient, silent sort, which, in it's meek steadfastness, is nobler than the contempt of personal danger, which is falsely called bravery. It is harder to endure than to strike. The supreme type of heroic, as of all other virtues, is Jesus Christ, whose gentleness was the velvet glove on the iron hand of an inflexible will. Of that best kind of heroes there are few brighter examples, even in the annals of the Church which numbers its virgin martyrs by the score, than this sweet figure of Ruth, as the eager vow comes from her young lips, which had already tasted sorrow, and were ready to drink its bitterest cup at the call of duty. She may well teach us to alter our judgments, and to recognize the quiet heroism of many a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. Her example has a special message, and exhorts us to see that the cultivation of gentleness must not run in to weakness on one hand, nor, on the other hand to lose meekness. The yielding birch tree bends in all its elastic branches and tossing ringlets of foliage to the wind; but it stands upright after storms that level oaks and pines. God's strength is gentle strength, and ours is most like His when it is meek and lowly, like that of the 'Strong Son of God.'"

May God work in each of us to bring forth the love and faith that marks a true hero!

OUTLINE FOR ABOVE MESSAGE.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Benjamin Franklin

1. Ambassador to France; had frequent meetings with French philosophers and intellectuals
2. They delighted in ridiculing his belief in the bible
3. Franklin was convinced they had never read the bible themselves, but were merely parroting the popular ideas of their day
4. So one evening, he asked them if he could read to them a most intriguing story he had discovered.
 - a. he pulled a hand-written copy of the Book of Ruth out of his pocket and proceeded to read it _
 - b. not telling them it's true origin
5. His audience was ecstatic.
 - a. they said, "That is the greatest love story we have ever heard.
 - b. "You musty publish it at once."
6. He waited for the uproar to subside then said, "It's already been published. It's in the Bible."
7. The scoffers were silenced

B. A Love Story

1. Truly, in all the literature of man, there is no love story more touching than the Book of Ruth
2. Though only 4 short chapters and 85 verse long, it's message is one of the most profound to ever be penned
3. It is our privilege to study Ruth over the next few weeks.

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

1. The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges
2. Have been studying for the last 5 weeks
 - a. a dark time
 - b. a time of idolatry, sin, rebellion
 - c. a time of brutality, perversion and great injustice
3. Contrasts
 - a. jewelry salesperson use a piece of black velvet as a background
 - b. the gold and gems stand out more vividly against the backdrop
 - c. they appear much more vivid than simply holding them over space
4. The story of Ruth is a fine diamond set over the darkness of the time of the Judges
5. And the story reminds us that while it seems all the world is going to hell, God still works quietly to accomplish His will
6. On the larger stage of history . . .
 - a. while most of Israel had turned from God to idols
 - b. and nation after nation was attacking her and putting her under cruel oppression
 - c. God had not left Himself without a witness
 - d. in a small corner of Judah he had a family that loved and followed Him
 - e. the newspapers of the day would have taken no notice of this family of four as they made their way to Moab
 - f. they would have reported on the latest events on the national

scene

- their stories would have been on the famine
- or on the prospects for another raid by the Ammorites
- g. but in God's economy, the story of Ruth is the real story
- 7. As we saw last week, our day is very much like the time of the Judges
 - a. there was no king in Israel
 - b. and everyone did what was right in their own eyes
- 8. It is very easy for us to become so discouraged by the moral darkness around us that we despair of hope
- 9. Please know that God has not left Himself without a witness
- 10. He is working quietly in spite of the darkness
- 11. You see friends, no matter how dark it gets, we have this promise _ Our God wins!!!
- 12. No matter what man does, no matter what the devil does, God gets the final victory
- 13. Nothing can thwart His purpose or plan
- 14. Take heart, be of good cheer _ Christ has overcome the world
- 15. There is a painting in a museum in Europe
 - a. a dark storm tossed seascape
 - b. great, roaring waves crashing on a ragged and rocky shore
 - c. lightening splits the sky, tearing holes in the night sky
 - f. the title of the painting is Peace
 - g. most people think it is horribly misnamed
 - h. but they fail to notice something
 - i. in the bottom right corner, nestled in a hollow of one of the rocks on the shore is a small bird
 - j. it is safe, warm, and secure in the cleft of the rock
- 16. Our world is in turmoil
 - a. it seems the storms of life are crashing on many of our heads
 - b. yet we can be safe and secure in the peace of the Prince of peace_
 - d. the Rock of our salvation = Jesus

B. The Story

1. The man = Elimelech
 - a. married to a gal named Naomi
 - b. two kids, Mahlon and Chilion
2. Because famine, they travel to Moab, where there is food
3. They live there for 10 years
4. Mahlon and Chilion marry a couple Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth
5. Then, Elimelech dies, as do both Mahlon and Chilion
6. Word reaches Naomi that the famine at her home in Bethlehem is over, so she decides to return
7. At first, both her daughter in laws say they want to go with her
8. But Naomi knows that she is going home an empty woman and that the prospects of re-marriage for two Moabite girls in Israel is not good at all
9. So she tries to convince them to stay in Moab where it will be a lot easier for them to re-marry
10. Orpah decides to stay, but Ruth cleaves to Naomi and refuses to depart
11. She has come to love her mother in law
12. And in some of the most poignant words ever to be spoken or penned she said . . .

C. Vs. 16-17

1. Clearly, Ruth had come to love Naomi
2. For think of what Ruth would be giving up to go with her
 - a. she would be leaving her home, family, friends
 - b. she would be leaving her own people, the Moabites, to go live with a group of foreigners, and enemies at that
 - c. she would be turning her back on her gods
3. Ruth had seen something in the family of Elimelech that drew her to the God of Israel
4. This was nothing less than a religious conversion she was making
5. And notice how complete the conversion was
6. "Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God."
7. Naomi knew that she belonged with her own people
 - a. God had given the Jews the land of Canaan
 - b. and she knew that she must return there
8. Her husband had taken her out of the land of promise to Moab during a time of plague
 - a. but really, they never should have left Bethlehem
 - b. they should have stayed and trusted in the Lord
9. Now that Naomi has lost everything, she turns back toward home
10. She is a prodigal daughter going home
11. Faith makes her pick up from where she is to move to the place God directs
12. And Ruth begins that trip of faith with her

APPLICATION

13. True faith always results in movement away from our sinful past _ toward God
14. For Naomi it meant a return to the place God had given
15. For Ruth it meant a leaving of her present life to begin the pilgrimage to the place of God's promise
16. So it is for us as well
17. When someone comes to faith in Christ, we often lead them in something called the sinners prayer _ [describe it]
18. But really, aren't Ruth's words are perfect model for the prayer of someone who is giving their life to Christ?
 - a. "Wherever you go, I will go."
Lord, you are the director and God of my life
 - no more will I take my direction and cues from the world
 - You are might light and my life, I will follow you.
 - b. "Wherever you lodge, I will lodge."
- Lord, I want to live with You.
 - I want my daily life to be filled with the sense of Your presence
 - I want to be at home with you and dwell in Your presence all the days of my life.
 - c. "Your people shall be my people."
- Lord, I want to be a part of Your family
 - I want to enter in to the fullness of fellowship with others who call on Your name out of a pure heart.
 - d. "And your God, my God."
- Lord Jesus, I long to know the Father
 - I want to worship Him and praise Him
 - I want to turn away from the idols of my imagination and embrace the true and living God

D. The Path of Faith Is The Path Of Love

1. Ruth's words reveal the path of faith
2. For her, they began in Moab and led on unseen trials to Bethlehem
3. For us, the path of faith begins in this world and leads by unseen trails to heaven
4. But what is vitally important to notice about Ruth's words is that they were motivated by love
5. The Path of Faith was also the path of love
6. Jesus does not want our faith to be some dry, lifeless, intellectual agreement with a set of doctrines
7. He wants our faith to be a loving and natural response to Him
8. Ex.: My marriage to Lynn
 - a. someone asks me to describe my wife and our marriage
 - b. so I rather indifferently describe her
 - c. then I describe the mundane mechanics of daily life
 - d. no! since I love her, I'm going to describe her in passionate terms of relationship!!!!
9. When someone asks you about your faith, what do you say?
 - a. to you give a dry, technical description of doctrines?
 - b. or is your faith a love relationship with the King of Creation?
 - c. what do you think is going to be more effective in drawing people to God?

III. CONCLUSION

A. Ruth's Commitment To The End

1. Finally, notice that Ruth's commitment was complete
2. She didn't make any reservations or limit it in any way
3. "Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried"
4. She wasn't thinking that she would give Bethlehem a try for a while but if things didn't work out she'd jump on the nearest camel and high tail it back to Moab
5. Her commitment was a life commitment

B. Heroic Faith

1. You know what, Ruth had faith in heroic proportions
2. Again, think of what she was leaving behind
 - a. family, friends, her own people
 - b. everything she knew was being left behind
 - c. and all that lay before her was a dark and uncertain future
3. I want to quote Alexander MacLaren,
Put the sweet figure of the Moabiteess beside the heroes of the Book of Judges, and we feel a great contrast. But is there anything in the pages of Judges more truly heroic than her deed, as she turned her back on the blue hills of Moab, and chose the joyless lot of the widowed companion of a widow, aged and poor, in a land of strangers, the enemies of her country and its gods? It is easier far to rush on the spears of the foe, amid the whirl and excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes so dreary a lifelong path. The gentleness of a true woman covers a courage of the patient, silent sort, which, in it's meek steadfastness, is nobler than the contempt of personal danger, which is falsely called bravery. It is harder to endure than to strike. The supreme type of heroic, as of all other virtues, is Jesus Christ, whose gentleness was the velvet

glove on the iron hand of an inflexible will. Of that best kind of heroes there are few brighter examples, even in the annals of the Church which numbers its virgin martyrs by the score, than this sweet figure of Ruth, as the eager vow comes from her young lips, which had already tasted sorrow, and were ready to drink its bitterest cup at the call of duty. She may well teach us to alter our judgments, and to recognize the quiet heroism of many a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. Her example has a special message, and exhorts us to see that the cultivation of gentleness must not run in to weakness on one hand, nor, on the other hand to lose meekness. The yielding birch tree bends in all its elastic branches and tossing ringlets of foliage to the wind; but it stands upright after storms that level oaks and pines. God's strength is gentle strength, and ours is most like His when it is meek and lowly, like that of the 'Strong Son of God.'

4. May God work in each of us to bring forth the love and faith that marks a true hero!