

Ruth

Ruth 1:15-22

READ

15 Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” **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. **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.” **18** When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. **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?” **20** She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. **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?” **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.

I We just finished a wonderful study in Ruth in our Wednesday night class that Chris led us through that got me thinking about some things. I know that it was man who put the books into the order that they are in, in our Bibles, but I have to believe that there was some control of what was happening, by God, His providence. The flow of the scriptures from Genesis through Revelation is too clear, too precise, for it to have been an accident of man’s choosing or even tradition that ordered the books the way we see them. This moving love story that we see in Ruth, is in sharp contrast with the bloody and turbulent accounts seen in Judges. But Ruth should not be seen as a contrast to Judges, but rather as a completion to its narrative. Throughout the centuries the dynamics of life haven’t changed all that much. Oh, yes, the particulars have, we have running water and air conditioning, cars, and the all important pizza parlor, but when you truly think about the life that man lives, it is still the same. We are born, we grow, we play, we learn, we laugh, we cry, we work, we fall in love, and we die. Obviously, I’ve left out a whole bunch of we’s, but the principles are there. Life is a series of good times, not so good times, and, unfortunately, even bad times. That is the dynamic of man’s life. As one looks at the Book of Judges, it is easy to become engrossed in the Heroics, the intrigue, and the larger than life characters of Judges, but we forget that there are many, many years of peace that are seen between the turmoil of the Israelites falling away and being oppressed by an outside nation and then rescued by God’s Judge. I think that the Book of Ruth is there to remind us of what we might be apt to forget in reading Judges, that no times are so wild but that in them are quiet corners, green meadows, where life goes on in peaceful isolation from the turmoil around it. When you look at Ruth, what do you see? Elimelech, trying to take care of his family, moves his wife and two sons to Moab because of the famine that is in Israel. Nothing out of the ordinary in that, California is full of transplants, which most of us are, or at least our parents or grandparents, or some relatives down the line were. There his sons find wives, again, nothing unique about this, and then the unfortunate tragedy of death strikes as Elimelech and his sons all die. Friends, this is life we are seeing unfold before us here, nothing unusual at all, just normal everyday life, the kinds of things that everyone experiences. Then Naomi and Ruth come back to Bethlehem

where life has been going on without them. The famine is over and people are just trying to get on with their lives, men and women love and work and weep and laugh, the women even talk about them...

Ruth 1:19

2

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?"

Boaz stands among his corn, and no sounds of war disturb them. Thankfully, even in the darkest times, there are always moments of love that seem to be magnified by the horror of the hate going on around them. That is Ruth. The peaceful pictures of this book seem to have been set as a background to the chaos of the Book of Judges, proving that love can be so powerful as to overcome even such chaos as is seen in the Judges.

The text begins in the middle of Naomi's discussion with her two daughters-in-law. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi's outlook seems to be pretty bleak, as it is for her daughters-in-law. She tells them to stay behind as she goes home to Bethlehem. Orpah does just that, but Ruth decides to stay with Naomi and make the journey with her.

So these two widows are left with each other. This is a fascinating story that truly illustrates the real dynamic of what love for someone else is all about. The definition of love is wanting for the absolute best for the object of the love. That means that in a marriage relationship that the purpose of each person in that relationship should be to seek for whatever is going to best for the other person. Isn't that is seen in this playback from Ruth? Naomi is willing to have her daughters-in-law go back to their families, knowing that it will be best for their future survival, and Ruth is willing to forego a chance at that future to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi to help take care of her. Both were willing to sacrifice for the other. That, brethren, is the definition of true love. Thus, we see the statement of love from Ruth to Naomi...

3 **16** Where you go, I will go, and where 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 I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

We praise Ruth's vow here, but we should not forget Naomi's unselfish pleading to be left to walk her weary path alone. There was love and sacrifice on both their parts.

Ruth's statement of love here is immortal. It gets mentioned in many wedding ceremonies, has been immortalized in poetry, and forever preserved in song. It has put into fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving hearts, and comes to us through the centuries, as warm and as living as when it was spoken in love by Ruth. The two strongest emotions of man's nature are welded together in it, and each gives it a portion of its passion...

- 4**
- A) Love
 - B) Religion

So closely are these interwoven that it is difficult to allot to each its share in the power of the statement. Now, there is no point trying to determine which of these might be greater in terms of the

statement, remember that Ruth was a Moabitess and as such worshipped idol gods. We don't know what she might have been taught by Naomi's sons in relationship to Jehovah but it seems safe to say that her oath to Naomi is not based on any degree of faith in Him. But we do see in her words the heroism of gentleness.

Now, put the figure of the Moabitess beside the heroes of the Book of Judges, and we feel the contrast. But is there anything in Judges that is any more heroic than what Ruth did? I guess the point, at least in my mind is, it is easier to face the spears of the foe not knowing what one's fate will be, especially in the heat of the moment and excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes a very uncertain lifelong path. More often than not, it is harder to endure than to strike.

The supreme example of this is Jesus Christ...

Heb 12:1-2

5

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The gentleness, the patience, the meekness of Christ was the velvet glove on the iron hand of His authority and inflexible will. Christ gave up everything for man...

Phil 2:5-7

6

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Christ gave up equality with God, sacrificed Himself, because of His love for man, so that all men might have the opportunity for salvation. Of that kind of hero, that kind of example, there are very few brighter examples, than the steadfast figure of Ruth and her sacrificing love.

Heroism comes in many forms. The mother who places herself in front of an oncoming vehicle to save a child exhibits that kind of unselfish heroism. I just saw an online video of a woman who saw an out of control car on the sidewalk coming and pushes a child she didn't know away from it and gets hit herself absorbing enough of the impact to protect child. We all see this as the heroism it is, but what about the heroism of the elderly person whose aches and pains are so debilitating that they can barely get about and yet they are here every service. What about the person who so willingly gives up their time to help someone else when they are in need? What about the ladies who have done such a spectacular job teaching our young people's classes, giving of their time and talent to help our young people grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? What about the young men who have overcome their natural reticence of being in front of people to participate in the worship service? What about the men who have made the decision to help in the teaching of classes, giving invitations, and bringing lessons from the pulpit? What about those who lead in worship services in leading singing or prayer or the Lord's Table? What about all the little things that need to be done, and are done to help people or the Church? These are all exhibitions of heroism and love and need to be recognized as such by us all. You see, like Ruth, none of these

things are being done so someone can say look at me, aren't I good. No, people are doing these things because they see a need, a need for someone else's welfare, a need for their own growth and welfare, a need for something that needs to be done in services.

7

Heroism is the act of giving of oneself

Ruth can help teach us to change and correct our personal judgments, and to recognize the quiet heroism of so many that lead a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. There is a point here, while her example has a special message to women, and exhorts them to see to it that, in the cultivation of the excellence of gentleness and to not let it run into weakness, it illustrates to all that there is a strength in faith that can be found nowhere else, the strength that comes through meekness in the face of adversity. This is the strength seen in the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You see, maybe one of the greatest examples of our Lord's heroism, as defined by the context of this lesson is to be found in...

Luke 22:41-42

8

41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

Christ shows us exactly what this idea of heroism is when He placed Himself under His father. Anyway can obey a command or law, but true heroism comes when you place yourself completely under the authority and love of someone else, when you sacrifice all that is you to become something else. The scriptures often translate this idea as submission or subjection. The idea comes from the Greek...

Hupotasso (NT:5293)

9

Primarily a military term, "to rank under" (hupo, "under," tasso, "to arrange"), denotes (a) "to put in subjection, to subject," Rom 8:20

The idea is to place oneself under or beneath someone or something else. That is what is seen in our Lord's statement. He was soon to be arrested and tried for something He did not do. He would be tortured and hung upon a cross to die unjustly. Yet He understood that His death was absolutely essential if man was to have the opportunity for salvation from His sins. Sacrifice is very often associated with desperate need and Christ knew that it was to be His sacrifice that supply man in his greatest need.

Now let's come back to our discussion of Ruth. Her beautiful words speak to her heroism, to her sacrifice in regard to Naomi and their situation. Here is where the placement of the book in the canon, to me really begins to make sense. Her story comes in among all these records of bloodshed and hate and provides a glimmer of hope that even in the face of such strife and difficulty love can flourish. It also shows us a major contrast. During the turmoil of the Book of Judges what is seen is the lack of commitment and faith of the Israelites. They continually made the choice to turn away from God, from His love and care for them and in their disobedience and lack of faith would find themselves in turmoil. But in Ruth, in the face of turmoil we see a great commitment of faith and

love beating back the onslaught of the trials of life. Even in the wild times of the difficulties of this life, there can still be a quiet corner where love can spread its wings. It may not always be love in this world, but it will always manifest itself through Christ from God.

The question has often been asked, what the purpose of the Book of Ruth is, and various answers have been given, the genealogical table at the end, showing David's descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture, have been speculated, and, probably to some extent, correctly. But I would ask you to consider this thought.

The Bible is very much a book for man. It is given so that man can have hope.

Rom 15:4 10

4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Friends we need to learn and to understand that even in the face of the worst that this world can throw at us, God's love, Christ's love is still there for all men. Love will always triumph, God will always win.

Rom 8:31 11

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

Ruth teaches that commitment, faith, love can overcome trials and hatred and pain. Now, and this is important, nothing can stop the travails of this world, those are Satan's tools and they will not stop, but the love of God will help man to win out. That is the beauty of the Book of Ruth in its place in the canon. It illustrates for us what scriptural heroism is. It is placing ourselves willingly and humbly under the authority of God, into His care and love. It is understanding that the trials of the world don't stop, they still crash against us, but it is knowing with absolute confidence that regardless of what happens in this life, here and now, God's love, Christ's sacrifice will carry us through to the next life, and as important and as tiresome this life can be, the next is worth the effort.

Ruth shows us what scriptural heroism is when she sacrifices her life and places herself beneath Naomi.

12 **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.

The only kind of heroism that counts for anything is scriptural heroism. It's giving of oneself to God through faithful obedience to His Word, being buried with Jesus Christ through baptism and being raised with Him into a newness of life.

So, who wants to be a hero?