

The Power of Example

Ruth 1:8-21

Introduction

- It may seem strange on Mother's Day to choose a text about a mother-in-law, but most mothers eventually become mothers-in-law.
 - Naomi is a good example for both.
 - One has to ask why Ruth left her own family and go to a foreign land with her mother-in-law? It seems such an unusual thing to do.
- 1. She Saw How Naomi Handled Herself in the Family
 1. It must have been that she been all that God requires of a wife and mother in regard to her family.
 2. It was likely also that she was a good and pleasant "mother-in-law" to Ruth as well.
 3. It must have been that Ruth saw Naomi as a good mother to her sons. Otherwise Ruth would have returned to her own family.
 4. As we said, is likely that she also saw her as a good wife. Ruth herself became a good wife to Boaz. It seems likely that she took Naomi as her model.
 5. Fifthly and very unusually, it is certain that she saw Naomi as a good mother-in-law.
- Let's take a look at what the first chapter of Ruth has to shed light on this truth...
 - But first let's make sure that, going into this here, that immediate family has two truths attached to them:
 - 2. The parent end of the deal knows the children well.
 - 3. Also, the children know her and the marriages "know" each other, though there can be some exterior secrets in a marriage and in regard to the parent child relationship... There can be NONE that are of the character and basic personal nature. Both opposite parent and children pretty much know the rest of the family well.
 - 4. It is evident that Naomi's daughters truly knew their mother-in-law. And that she truly "knew" them. This is evident from the give and take we see as the story progresses.
- Now, "Mother-in-Law" jokes are pretty prevalent in the world today.
 - There was a time when this was not so.
 - There was a basic respect for women that extended into the time of the marriage of their children.
 - In fact, just a while ago, there was this abiding respect for all women, from the time they began to mature toward womanhood onward.

- Of course, it was good as long as a woman lived in a fashion consistent with this respect.
- Now this is not to say that she had to “earn” a continuing degree of this respect.
- Rather it was the assumption of society that they were due this treatment.
- Let’s notice a few things that will explain and enlighten our take on this passage.

1. Naomi expresses appreciation to both of her daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:8-11).

⁸ And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, “Surely we will return with you to your people.”

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?”

Here in v8 we see evidence of the relationship that had developed between Naomi and her two step-daughters.

⁸ And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”

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- At the point of verse 19, Elimelech, Naomi’s husband is dead.
 - The two young men were husbands of Ruth and Orpah, both women taken from Moab as wives of the mentioned sons of Naomi.
 - They had been in Moab some 10 years when they heard that
- Naomi, quite understandably, because of the death of Elimelech, was overcome with grief over the death of her husband.
 - Her sons are dead and her husband is now dead and she charges her DiLs to head back to Bethlehem, which they were from with the hope of finding new husbands there. (1:8)

⁸ And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.”

- It is wonderful to think about the strong example that Naomi was here to Ruth
 - and the great concern and tenderness she shows them in the midst of her own tragedy (husband and two sons dead).
 - It is almost as if she had taken them as her own daughters (which she essentially had) and wished to treat them as such.
- She blessed for their treatment of her and of the men in her life.

2. She expresses good wishes for them. It is almost a prayer (Ruth 1:9).

⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

- It is apparent that her wishes for them were spiritually based.
 - Remember that Naomi was from Israel, Bethlehem in Ephraim.
 - Ruth and Orpah were from Moab where there had been the rumor of food during the great drought that had struck Northern Israel some 10 years before.
- What a great thing to express to one another!
 - To ask that the Lord grant blessing and that He enable you to find rest in the midst of difficult times.
- I can’t help but believe that this was not a sudden expression on her part.
 - Notice that there is no sense of surprise or expression that this was unexpected by Ruth and Orpah.
 - It is clear, at the least that it is Naomi’s habit to turn to the Lord in times when help was needed and when she lacked the means to do what was needed.
 - That is what we see here.

3. Their weeping shows a bond of love between them (Ruth 1:9, 14).

.⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

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

- Both Naomi and Ruth were ancestors of King David and therefore ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- It is probable that Mary’s family reminded her of her distant ancestors and held up Naomi and Ruth as examples of what a good mother ought to be.
- Since God always chooses wisely, we can conclude that Mary, too, was a good mother.
- This is reinforced for us when we recall how Jesus followed the commandment:

“Honor thy Father and Mother.”

- In His teaching we hear Him quote the commandment at least 6 times: (some were repeats from other Gospels)
- He sure that He ALWAYS did so, up to and including the moments before His death on Calvary – He gave her over to John’s care.
- I think this is further reinforced by the fact that when Jesus spoke about Heaven he called it home.
 - He called it the Father’s house.
 - We should conclude that He must have been recalling his own home at Nazareth—perhaps with some application, calling it a little bit of Heaven on earth.
 - How sad it is that for many home is instead a little bit of Hell on earth!
 - We can apply here as well that Naomi had made the home in which these two women had lived for some 10 years a place where they felt welcome and blessed.

4. She Saw How Naomi Handled Grief

- We should note also that the grief was real (Ruth 1:21).

²¹ I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

Naomi wasn’t simply saying what those who have just lost a family member ought to say. Nor was she looking for sympathy.

- The grief was honest and human (Ruth 1:20).

²⁰ But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

- Her grief was real and deep but she didn’t want to burden her daughters-in-law.
- Because her relationship with God was real, she sought to deal with it in the manner in which a child of God ought to.
- Still her grief did not destroy her faith. She complained against God (understandably) but she still believed.z
 - So many think that there is never a reason to be honest about our feelings, troubles, loss to God –

- that would be complaining against God and would be an attack against Him.
- This is not so – God is our Father and encourages us to take our burdens to him and cast them up Him.
- There’s a difference between a spiritual definition of a burden and a secular one.
 - The world defines it as an encumbrance, something that can hinder our life or enjoyment of same.
 - The Bible however use it literally, as a burden.
 - Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden, however, is light(Matt. 11:30).
 - It is not that the burden, in this sense is not present at all, but that it is eminently bearable.
- There are several ways in which “burden” is used figuratively:
 1. It can speak of real and severe care that falls on a person.
 2. It was used of the content and duty of a Prophet to preach and tell the message that God laid upon him.
 3. Luke 11:46 speaks of a false view of rules and rites as a burden instead of what it was intended to be, that which led one to a knowledge of God and a realization of the need for a Savior.
 4. In Psalm 38:4 David speaks of sin as a burden with the implication that it needed badly to be removed.
 5. In Galatians 6:2 Paul speaks of a burden meaning responsibility borne by believers.
 6. Finally, in Psalm 55:22, David implied that God was going to send a permanent and full solution to the existing burden of sin and that God would never allow the righteous to be “moved” from their position in Him.
- All of this seen together tells us that Ruth...

5. She Saw That the Source of Naomi’s Strength Lay in her Faith (16ff)

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."*

- We are touched by the phrase "your people will be my people"
 - but the most important words are "and your God my God."
- This underscores for us that Naomi had been a religious example for the two step-daughters.
 - That example was sufficient to draw the two, Moabitesses (followers of a Pagan god) to embrace the God Whom Naomi served.
- It was, apparently clear that this God was real and worth serving.
 - It was also very apparent that Ruth and Orpah had the need and necessity to give themselves over to Him.

6. She saw Jehovah God as superior to the gods of Moab. When she did she determined to give her heart and alliance to Jehovah.

- The Husbands of all three had served Moabite gods.
 - Chemosh - In the Hebrew Bible, Chemosh was the national deity of the Moabites whose name most likely meant "destroyer," "subduer," or "fish god."
 - While he is most readily associated with the Moabites, according to Judges 11:24 he seems to have been the national deity of the Ammonites as well.
 - He became angry with his people and permitted them to become the vassals of Israel; His (Gods' anger passed, he commanded Mesha to fight against Israel, and Moabite independence was reestablished (Moabite Stone, lines 5, 9, 14 et seq.).
- Interestingly, According to the Hebrew Bible, the worship of this god, "the abomination of Moab," was
 - introduced at Jerusalem by Solomon (1 Kings 11:7), but
 - was abolished by Josiah (2 Kings 23:13).
 - (Note: The Talmud quoted by Rashi says that his wives built the temples and he is considered responsible for not stopping them.)
 - On the Moabite stone, Mesha (2 Kings 3:5) ascribed his victories over the king of Israel to this god, And Chemosh drove him before my sight."
- 1. Obviously, Ruth did not do this because she had no sorrows, no tragedies, no disappointments.
- Faith did not isolate her from the harsh realities of life.
 - Faith did insulate her so that they could be endured.
 - Neither did it do so in Naomi's life.

- She had given evidence of this faith throughout, it seems, virtually all of the time that Ruth had been with her.
- 2. Likely led by Naomi's example, Ruth began to have this faith in spite of all that had gone wrong.
- This is true of many great believers in the Bible.
 - It is certainly true of David in the Old Testament and of
 - Paul in the New Testament.
 - Life was not easy for them and it may not be easy for us,
 - but faith can live in our hearts even in the most difficult circumstances.
- 3. At least in both Naomi and Ruth's case, it was a tough faith - an indestructible faith.

Conclusion

- Many often use these words of Ruth's at weddings,
 - but they come from a different setting and they bless and guide us today.

And she 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."*

Illustration

- NAOMI GAVE RUTH A GREAT gift: faith. Ruth gave Naomi a great gift: a child who was the ancestor of King David and King Jesus. Today is the day to be thankful for the things our mothers (and mothers-in-law) have given us. It is also a day to give something back to them.
- There are also those surrogate mothers: people who filled the role of mother or were a mother figure to children who were not biologically theirs. Many have been blessed by foster mothers and step-mothers, and even by neighbors who provided a mother image when it was needed. Let us be thankful for them and express our thanks to them as well.

7. *The story of Naomi and her ministry and instruction to Ruth is illustrative of a number of things:*

A. How the Lord transforms people caught up in the chaos of a rebellious world

- That was Naomi's position at the start of the story. Caught up in the chaos caused by everyone doing as he or she saw fit, her life, once full, had become bitter and empty. Having lost her husband and her sons, and with no apparent hope of grandchildren, the future looked bleak. But then God acted in transforming kindness. The contrast between the Naomi we meet in 1:20–21 and in 4:14–17 is striking. Where there was death, the Lord brought new life. Where there was bitterness, the Lord brought joy. Where there was emptiness, the Lord brought fullness.

B. How the Lord's transforming kindness is experienced as refuge is taken under the shadow of his wings

- Taking refuge in the shadow of the Lord's wings is a graphic picture of faith. It speaks of protection and security in time of trouble (see Psalm 36:7). According to 2:12, it was what Ruth had done by aligning herself with Naomi, Naomi's people and Naomi's God. It is a picture taken up by the Lord Jesus shortly before his death on the cross. To those who were refusing to submit to him as their King, he said, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing' (Matt. 23:37). The Lord Jesus is the Lord who guarantees protection and security to all who take refuge in him. All who do, experience his transforming kindness.

C. How the Lord uses apparently insignificant people as channels of his transforming kindness

- Other histories of the time when the events of Ruth took place would probably overlook the lives of two destitute widows. But they were the Lord's chosen channels of his transforming kindness to his people. As they experienced the Lord's kindness, they were part of his plan to bring others to be transformed by his kindness. That is a pattern the Lord has followed throughout human history. It is a pattern he continues to follow today. As Paul writes to the church in Corinth:
- Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (1 Cor. 1:26–29).

D. Ruth is illustrative of the unfolding story of the Bible

- Every detail of the plot has significance as it illustrates how the Lord fulfils his plan to show transforming kindness to rebellious people. As the story unfolds, three features of the way God works stand out:

1. *God's control of circumstances*

- The story is told by a narrator who highlights how certain details 'just so happened' to fall into place. For example, chapter 2 starts with the information that Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz (2:1). When Ruth then goes out to glean in the fields, the narrator informs us: 'As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech' (2:3). Bethlehem was a farming community. Fields belonged to various farmers. Ruth was a newcomer. She would not know whose field was whose. She did not know Boaz. Boaz did not know her. But the narrator wants us to know that God was in control of these details. It was no coincidence that Ruth ended up in Boaz's field. God doesn't do coincidences. Particular people are found in particular places at particular times and play their part in God's unfolding plan of transforming kindness.

2. *God's use of apparently insignificant people*

- Ruth tells the story of very ordinary people. Naomi and Ruth are destitute widows. When they arrive in Bethlehem they possess nothing. In addition, Ruth is a foreigner; a Moabitess—from a nation with a scandalous pedigree and a bad history with Israel. But God did not use the rich and influential. He chose to use the lowly, unlikely and apparently insignificant.

3. *God's provision of a redeemer*

- The words 'redeem/redemption/redeemer' occur twenty-three times in the eighty-five verses of Ruth. The essence of redemption is reversal—the reversal of a bad situation, at the expense of a redeemer. The situation of Naomi and Ruth was desperate. They discovered that Boaz was the perfectly suited kinsman-redeemer provided by God to reverse their fortunes.
- These three features of the way God works are illustrative of the unfolding story of the whole Bible, which finds its fulfilment in God's transforming kindness through our Lord Jesus Christ. Was it a coincidence that the events of Ruth happened in Bethlehem where, 1000 or so years later, the Lord Jesus was to be born? Was it a coincidence that the Lord Jesus was born to an apparently insignificant young woman? (Note the similarity between Ruth 4:13 and Luke 2:7.) Was it a coincidence that, when the Lord Jesus was born, an elderly woman, called Anna, gave thanks to God and

spoke to all who were looking forward to the *redemption* of Jerusalem (see Luke 2:38)?

E. Ruth is illustrative of the individual stories within the unfolding story

- As the Lord's plan is fulfilled through Naomi and Ruth, we are provided with illustrations of the way individuals are transformed by his kindness. The Book of Ruth illustrates:

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