

Ruth 1: 1-17; “Ruth’s Loyalty to Naomi”, A Mother’s Day Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 12th, 2019,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

I have not often preached on the book of Ruth, although I love this book very much. It is such a spiritually rich book. And one of the reasons that it is so rich is because it so relational in the best sense; the sense in which we are shown what true godliness is. This book teaches us many good things of how we as Christians ought to think upon one another, and care for one another. It teaches us how mothers ought to relate to daughters-in-law and daughters-in-law to mothers-in-law. It teaches us about how husbands ought to relate to their wives, and wives to their husbands. It further teaches us what those men who want to have wives should look for, in obtaining a wife and finding favor with the Lord. It teaches us how mothers can be greatly encouraged by both sons and daughters.

Ruth had what I would call, a righteous loyalty. 1st - She had the kind of loyalty that responded to the kindness that had been shown to her. (verses 1-9) 2nd – She had a loyalty which would not turn back when great difficulties were shown to her. (verses 10-15) 3rd – She had a loyalty which would take Naomi’s people to be her people and Naomi’s God to be her God. (verses 16-18) Let’s see if we can grow in regard to our understanding of what righteous loyalty is today.

1st – Ruth’s was a righteous loyalty because she responded to the kindness that Naomi had shown to her. (Verses 1-9)

Let’s think about this kindness, Naomi’s kindness, for a few moments. She had moved to Moab with her husband, Elimelech, in the days of the Judges, during a time of famine. It does not say whether Elimelech knew the Lord or not. But we do know from Naomi’s speech in Chapter 2, that she knew the Lord; for in her bitterness she spoke of God in personal terms; of what the Lord had done for her and to her. Let me ask you, if you are a person who realizes that you are only placed here upon the earth for a few years, and that the greatest thing in all of this life is knowing the Lord? You should seek to find the Lord when you are young, so that your future in this life, and in the next, will be secured. The best laid plans of Elimelech did not secure him from what you and I would call an early death. But if you know the Lord, it will not ultimately matter. You will be eternally secure if you will trust in the promises of God and Christ; and the earlier in your life the better.

It is a great kindness when your mother tells you the truth about life. When from a young child you come to know the Scriptures and the truth about God, and about yourself, because you saw it in her, and you heard it from her. I think that Naomi did teach her children these kinds of things. And once again, we are not told whether her sons knew the Lord, and they did die young. Were they ready to meet God? Naomi knew the Lord, and so we know that whatever would befall her, all would come right for her in the end. And the same will be true for you, if you will believe in the God of your mother, if she knows the Lord. Praise God for a mother who will show you the path of life by her words and by her deeds. Thank God for a godly mother who speaks to you about Christ, and about the Bible. Listen to the old poem by William Ross Wallace

– *“Infancy’s the tender fountain, power may with beauty flow, mother’s first to guide the streamlets, From them souls unresting grow – grow on for the good or evil, sunshine streamed or evil hurled; for the hand that rocks the cradle Is the hand that rules the world.” “Woman, how divine your mission, here upon our natal sod!” “Keep, oh, keep the young heart open, always to the breath of God!” “All true trophies of the ages are from mother-love imperaled; For the hand that rocks the cradle, is the hand that rules the world.”*

Oh, mothers here among us, how greatly we value your godly life and your example, your words and your touch upon the lives of your children. What power is given to godly mothers to move and

shape the world of the future if you are faithful to the Lord. Well, Naomi had come there to Moab with her husband and her two sons. And evidently, they were there for a while, and Elimelech had intended to stay in that country. Perhaps business was better there. There was certainly food there. We don't read of his planning on going back. At any rate, things did not work out for him in the way he anticipated, and he died. And Naomi was left with the boys, Mahlon and Chilion, and they took wives after a time, and then; how awful it must have been for Naomi, when after 10 years, her two sons Mahlon and Chilion also died. Think of what an awful providence of God this was to her, after having already lost her husband. All of her hopes of happiness in relation to her family were dashed. And her faith in God was being severely tested.

She had lost all that was dear to her in the family that she had brought with her from Israel when they moved. The only persons that she now had left to comfort her and encourage her were her two Moabite daughters-in-law; Ruth and Orpah, and she knew that they, too, were deeply feeling their loss. She had heard that there was bread in Israel, and so she was now determined to go back. Both of her daughters-in-law had become very close to her in the ten years that she has been with them. They both, no doubt, loved her with the human love of family. The human love which exists in some families is a certainly a blessing of God. It is a common grace which God sometimes gives to those families in which he has the purpose of striving to bring some of them to Himself. It is evident that we are seeing this in this story because when Naomi rises up to go back and return to the land of Judah, both of her daughters-in-law rise up and set off to go to Israel with her.

Let me ask the children among us today. When you are going through some trouble, or some difficulty, do you feel drawn to go to your mother and speak with her of it? I trust that you will. Don't you have the hope that if you do go to her, that she will be there for you; to comfort you, and encourage you, to guide you into the right way, and to help you in regard to your emotional and spiritual needs? This is a common grace which God gives to you through her, and you ought to be very thankful for it, and for her. In fact, on such a day as this, you ought to tell her that you are thankful for her. These daughters-in-law of Naomi; you see that they responded to her kindness to them, because of her years of doing this for them; they would respond by following her back to Israel. That was their first inclination. They wanted to be with her always.

That was the common grace that was given to them and to her. Dear children and those of you who may not know the Lord. Let the common grace which you see in your dear mother lead you on to trust in her God for your salvation. It takes a special grace to know the Lord. You have seen your mother pray for you to the Lord; let it lead you to your praying for yourself, that you yourself might find the Lord; that He is real, and He is good. Someday the earthly relationship with your mother will come to an end. But as it says in the Scriptures in Psalm 27: 10 – “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.” And you; believe this promise; and find eternal life by it, by coming to the Lord Jesus and asking Him for grace, and forgiveness, and a spiritual relationship with Him.

I hope that you will understand, however, that your mother will not always know all the reasons for all the things that happen to you. Naomi did not understand the providence of the Lord toward her, in this loss of her husband and her boys, but she believed that the Lord would be gracious to her in her returning to the Land of Promise; the land of her people and her God. In this she was wise. I believe that she wisely saw that it was a matter of worship and obedience. She would not be able to worship with others in a land of idolatry, like Moab was. She would be greatly hindered in following the Lord, if she remained there in Moab. If she returned to Israel she would be with other believers, and she might also find answers to her questions of why the Lord had done these things.

But it was her kindness, not to insist that her daughters-in-law return with her, or that she would insist upon their coming back and worshiping the only true and living God; just because she would. She says in verse 8 – “Go return each to her mother's house.” “The Lord deal kindly with

you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” “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.” I think that she very much wanted for them to come with her, and to come to know the Lord and worship Him. She very much wanted this, in her heart. But I think that she knew and understood that it would take a great work of grace on God’s part, and much explaining on her part, to convince them that they should come back with her, and so she left the matter of their choice between themselves and God. I believe that her words were full of kindness in this regard.

I hope that each of us should thank God for a gentle mother, if we have had one, who wants more than anything for us to come to Christ, and yet knows that she cannot force us to come. But notice how both Orpah and Ruth responded to her kindness. They lifted up their voices and wept. All mothers who have mothered us in natural things or spiritual things, whether they are our birth mother or not, are precious to us; or they should be. This is I think why we have a Mother’s Day in this country. It is God who has given us mothers. Let us see that we respond to their kindness by telling them how much we love them.

2nd – Ruth had a loyalty which would not turn back when great difficulties came to her. (verses 10-15)

Let’s think about the loyalty of these two daughters-in-law of Naomi. “And they (both of them) said to her, ‘Surely we will return with you to your people.’” “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?” “Turn back, my daughters, go – for I am too old to have a husband.” “If I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown?” “Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands?” “No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me?” “Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.” “And Naomi said, ‘Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’”

As a believer in Christ the test of true loyalty to your mother is whether you will follow her even when she is going through great difficulties. I am not saying that every daughter or son’s situation is like that of Ruth and Orpah. You may be in the home with your mother, or out of the home; off away going to college, or married and living at a distance. But there is a principle of truth that we need to glean from these verses. It is a foundational principle of true and righteous loyalty. You may have always seen your mother as a very strong person; emotionally, mentally, and spiritually; because that is the way that she has always been to you. Or you may have seen your mother as a person that is not strong in these ways. But the real question is this. That, whether you live far away or in the same house; whether your mother is strong or weak; is your loyalty such that you greatly desire to be with her in spirit when she is going through trials and difficulties?

And is it your intention to follow her into those difficulties and strongly support her in those difficulties, until there is a resolution of them which will let her see the hand of God as being good in relation to these things? Will you stick with her, and not go off to pursue the things of interest to yourself, in the hour of your mother’s greatest need? This is a very realistic application of these things that Ruth did, in relation to her mother-in-law Naomi. The reason that I say this is because of what happened here. Both Orpah and Ruth initially said that they would go back to Israel with Naomi. But when the difficulty of Naomi’s being able to help them to find husbands was presented to them, Orpah, although she loved her mother-in-law with a human love, she did not go with her. She kissed her goodbye and went back to the worldly life of Moab, as it was in those days.

She had a certain amount of loyalty, but I am saying that it was not a righteous loyalty. It was not a righteous loyalty because Orpah only looked at things from a selfish standpoint. She had no faith in God, that God is able to do all things. She had no thought of helping Naomi, nor of trying to understand her God; the God who Naomi had no doubt declared to her, was the only true and living God. The person who has righteous loyalty will stick with their mother or other loved ones in

their family, to follow them into their trials and difficulties and will attempt to help them with their basic spiritual, emotional, and physical needs if it is possible. And this will only be done righteously if you have faith in God.

The difficulty with older children doing this, for one or both of their parents, is that your mom or dad has always been the one who took care of you. It is very difficult in many cases, for you to think of caring for them. In this case that we are looking at, Orpah could not imagine how she would ever find a husband by going to Israel, a completely different culture, but even worse, with laws regulating so many aspects of life. She did not believe that it could happen. That is why she went back to her people and to her gods. Things in Moab were much more convenient. On the other hand, it would appear that it would be very unpleasant and inconvenient for Ruth if she remained loyal to Naomi and she went with her to Israel. But Ruth had faith, and she would live by faith. It says at the end of verse 14, “but Ruth clung to her”.

Let me ask you now; how is it that you think about these inconveniences? Love thinks not of the inconvenience but of the person that they care for. I hope that each of us will remember that the righteous person, whether they are young or old, lives by their faith. Faith clings to God, and they also will cling in a righteous way to their mother. They are not only saved from their sins by faith; asking God that He would forgive them; but they also live by faith in God that He will help them to learn what true loyalty to their loved one, really is. Ask yourself if this is what you are doing and whether you pray in faith asking what you can do to help your mother? Ruth did not turn back from the challenge to her faith.

3rd – Ruth’s loyalty was a true and righteous loyalty because she declared her loyalty to Naomi’s people and to her God.” (verses 16-18)

“But Ruth said: ‘Entreat me not to leave you, or 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.’” Ruth not only loved her mother-in-law with a human love, caring for her welfare so very deeply and personally, but she also had been given the gift of spiritual sight. She was able to see the value of personally declaring her faith to her mother in no uncertain terms. She could see the difficulties of what might come to her from her going with Naomi to the land of Israel, but by faith she would accept whatever would come. She wouldn’t take no for an answer. She tells Naomi to not entreat her to leave her, or to turn back from following after her. She is going to go with her, she is going to lodge with her, and she is going to share her life with her.

And her loyalty went farther even than that yet. She would take up a profession of faith in the God of Israel Himself, and the people of God, with that profession. She actually takes a vow almost like someone would take when they make a profession of faith in Christ. Only she had no pastor there to ask her the questions as she stood in the waters of baptism. It was seeing the grace of God in Naomi, that had led Ruth to this place; to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel, and to take Him to be her God and the people of God to be her people. When you as one who believes in God and in Christ; make a profession of faith; you will be confessing Christ, and saying that through Him you will take God to be your God, and His people to be your people. Where Christ died on the cross, you died. Where He was buried, you were buried with Him. Where the people of God gather, you will gather with them. And you will be faithful to stick with them, wherever you end up living. Nothing but death will part you from your love and from your care for the people of God.

Naomi had challenged Ruth’s loyalty at several important points, but Ruth passed the test with flying colors. Even so, your loyalty to Christ in terms of your commitment to be loyal to the people of God will be tested at various points in your Christian life. And if you have received Christ’s grace, God Himself will be faithful to bring you to see how you can demonstrate your loyalty to your family, and your loyalty to the brethren.

