

Reading: Ruth 1:1-22

Subject: Determined to go on.

Last time we saw God's smile beginning to be recognised by Naomi. We noted 3 of 7 things: **1. Hearing** – as she heard the Lord had visited His people in Israel and there was food there; we saw her and her daughters-in-law **2. Departing** and heading off to Israel and they talked about the situation and we saw Naomi **3. Praying** for them to be truly blessed by the Lord, but incredibly she wanted them to return and to stay in Moab and go back to their people and even their gods. Why would she do that? We'll note more of this as we go on and consider 4 more areas up to v18:

4. Grieving (v9-14)

Naomi after her prayer then kisses her daughters-in-law farewell. The three of them cry out loud and unashamedly. Recognise the great grief and emotion in the situation here. They had been bound together in love and in tragedy. Naomi's words and prayer had pulled at their heartstrings even more and it produces a flood of emotion expressed in weeping together.

Understand, recognise tears are part of our natural, God-given and created emotions. We are not machines, but human beings with emotions. Yet often in our society tears, even tears of mourning, can be viewed with shame or suspicion - especially if the one crying is a man! I know some Christians who feel it is wrong, a weakness to show emotion - publicly at least - even at the loss of loved ones. They seem to think it is unspiritual to grieve or mourn; to show they are hurting. We are to be real and own there are things that hurt us, that the death of a loved one does grieve us and the sorrow we feel is intense; it may hurt us even more as believers, for our senses and sensitivities are not hardened, as we don't take refuge in euphemisms for death for we see what death is. Christianity does not dehumanize us, but make us more truly human as God intended and designed. I'm not advocating emotionalism, a false emotional parade, or crocodile

tears, but God forbid we ever give the impression that tears are wrong. Christians also hurt and grieve. We are not Stoics, to keep a stiff upper lip and shown no emotions. Tears are a God-given release mechanism for grief, pain, sorrow and are part of grieving.

Orpah and Ruth say they will not go back to their people, but will go on with Naomi and then she addresses them in a harsher and more clinical way. Why would they go back with her? She is clinical in her assessment of the situation - too old for children if she could have a husband and become pregnant that night; would they really wait for the boys to be grown up? Naomi is grieved for their sake because it has gone so bitter with her because the Lord's hand had gone out against her. Naomi is laying it on thick to show that her future was hopeless and if they went back with her, so would theirs be.

This is said from a position of grief. No doubt she would have desired her girls to be with her; in fact, calls them "*my daughters*" - they were so very closely bound together in love and grief. They would have been a comfort to her, been friendly faces as well as friends back there in Bethlehem, but there was no point or hope - as she had said. Their reaction to this was to weep again! Naomi's words had brought the girls to a decision time - to go back to what they knew or go on to an unknown, uncertain future? It would appear that Naomi does everything to discourage them from going with her and to persuade them to return back to their families and gods. So, we see:

5. Leaving (v14)

As they weep together again, Orpah kisses Naomi and leaves. Naomi's words had hit home to both Orpah and Ruth, yet both react differently in and to the same situation. Initially both said they would go with her, but Naomi had bluntly told them the situation, perhaps underlining its harshness if they were to go with her, so they would realise the reality of the situation. Again, we question "*Why did*

Naomi discourage them to go with her, but to go back to their people and gods?" She should have encouraged them to go and be with God's people and to serve the Lord and not false gods.

Some suggest Naomi was ashamed of her sons having taken pagan Moabite women as their wives. I don't think that washes. Don't forget Naomi has begun to recognise God's goodness to His people in removing the famine, she knew God was good, she would want her daughters-in-law to know and serve this same God. What she does here would appear to be "*anti-evangelism*" - it is like a family member asking to come to church, or to be told about Jesus and you point them to the JW's or send them to consider ancient Greek gods!

Here I feel Naomi is putting before them the cost of discipleship. Yes, from one point of view it is humane advice, but what she is really doing is talking about the cost of belonging to God's covenant people, the cost of discipleship. She's laid before them **they could have everything minus the Lord; or they could have the Lord plus nothing!** That is the option set before them. What would they choose? The Lord Jesus did this with the rich young ruler as He called on him to consider the needful thing and, for him it was to sell all that he had, but he went away and did not follow the Lord Jesus. Jesus spoke about the cost of being His disciple and to count the cost.

Modern evangelism will say something like "*Come to Jesus and everything will be fine, no problems, health, wealth and prosperity, marriages sorted out, children sorted out and all will be wonderful*", but the Bible, the Lord Jesus stresses the need to count the cost of following Him. To be a Christian means we are going to have to go against the flow of the world and its ways; to take up our cross and follow Him; stand up and even stand out as different; to live in a way that is against the thinking and culture of the day - we are not anti-culture but often counterculture; we are in the world, but not of it. We are following a despised and reviled Saviour, and we can expect

the same. As Christians we can be mocked, scorned, laughed at, despised and set as nothing and things could get really tough as persecution, suffering, torture and even death come upon us just because we are Christians.

Do you want everything minus the Lord Jesus, having the world and its ways? Yet you will lose your eternal soul. Are you prepared for nothing plus the Lord Jesus? You will have the best part and will not ultimately lose out at all.

Orpah counted the cost and turned back. Yes, she had feelings and affections for Naomi, but, to be honest, she would rather stay put and enjoy what she knew. Sadly, many have known of the Lord Jesus, even had affection for Him, admired Him and His people and all He stands for, but they will not go with Him as it will mean giving up too much, it is too costly in their view. They admire Him, but not enough to leave all else to follow Him. What about us here? Will we be those who, like Orpah, turn back when we realise the true cost of being a Christian and serving King Jesus? Let's move on and see:

6. Cleaving (v14-16)

It is a strange word "*cleaving*" - NIV says "*clung to her*", AV says "*clave unto her*". Used here, the word "*cleave*" means to stick to, to adhere to, to be glued to, superglued to. It is the same word used in Genesis 2 about a husband and wife cleaving together. Ruth wasn't leaving Naomi, there was no way she would do that. Naomi tries to urge Ruth to leave, to go back with Orpah and to do as her sister-in-law. Now Naomi lays it on the line "*your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.*" In other words – do as she did - go back to your old religion, town, people etc and start over.

Then we have Ruth's reply in v16 & 17. This is the first time recorded that Ruth speaks in the book - her words are legendary. Some people

have used them in their vows at weddings, but here Ruth proclaims them as a vow to her mother-in-law, and ultimately to the Lord. These are precious words to so many, they are personally so to Siân and myself, as they were part and parcel of confirming my call to go to Bible college and all that would bring...

These words show Ruth knew what she was doing, going to and what she was leaving; she had considered the matter and, in these words, she professes her determination to stay with her mother-in-law. She is not in love with her mother-in-law's wealth, possessions, beauty, power or influence - because Naomi had none of these. Ruth loved Naomi and was going to stick to and with her whatever. It is a wonderful as a pledge of human love and devotion expressed. As a pledge to stick with Naomi it is really precious and moving, but it says more than just Ruth cleaving to Naomi, for it tells us of her:

7. Believing (v 16 & 17)

Ruth now shows not only her determination to cleave to and stay with Naomi, but also the main reason why she will do so. Hebrew scholars stress that this is a wonderful paragraph, with many technicalities about it and two things draw our attention to the heart of this confession - its poetic structure and the use of the verbs. It took some following what they were saying, but I think I understand it and this is how I think it works ... The 5 sentences are in block form, in a structure designed to emphasise its central truth.

The **1st sentence** is an introductory command "Don't urge me to leave you to turn back from you" which pairs with the **5th sentence** which is a concluding oath "May the Lord deal with me..." The **2nd and 4th sentences** are called verbal pairs, expressing Ruth's intentions of what she will do. The **3rd, the central sentence** expresses the heart of what she is says. It reads in English "*Your people will be my people and your God my God*" which seems to express what her intention is going to be, but actually in the Hebrew

there are no verbs at all in that sentence. So, she is saying to Naomi *"Do you know why all those other things are true? It is because **your people, my people and your God, my God.**"* It is intended to create an effect as it is not a pledge of what **she will do**, but a declaration of **what she has already done**. Naomi's people were already her people; because Naomi's God was already her God.

The reason for cleaving to Naomi was that she had become a believer in the Lord and she didn't want to go back to where He wasn't honoured, loved or worshipped. It is a strong commitment and cleaving to the Lord, above and beyond to Naomi. It is the strongest statement of conversion in OT. The issue was the worship of God; it's as if Ruth is saying in NT terms *"I'm not going home - as there are no Christians there, there's no church there, you're the only Christian in town, you're leaving and I'm going with you to be with God's people."* Ruth is saying that she belongs to Naomi because she belongs to the Lord and so *'your people, my people because your God, my God'*! Ruth owns she was converted and trusting the Lord as her God. She does not want to go back to her former gods, or even to her people and her old ways, but to go on with God's people, to learn about Him, how to worship and serve Him.

What about us? Like Ruth we may have heard of this God and seen how He affects the lives of those who believe in Him and it may be dawning on us that this God is someone we should make our God. Have we come to trust Him as our own personal God and Saviour through the Lord Jesus Christ? Many of us here have. If so, do we value Christian fellowship as precious? Do we make the time to get to church to learn of this God together with His people? Yes, to follow the Lord Jesus as our Saviour may mean that we will lose much the world will offer as real and precious, but it is worthless ultimately. He is **the pearl and the treasure** that is worth giving everything else up for. Would we be willing to give up everything to have Him? **To give all that we are to get all that He is - that is the**

gospel of Jesus. It is a narrow road to go to heaven, but it will take us to heaven and all its wonders and joys then and on the way! The broad road that leads to destruction may seem so tempting, so profitable and so much more attractive, but if we could ask Orpah and Ruth now who made the wisest decision, then there would be no question which was the wisest and benefitted the most.

I'm not going to even try to open up on v16 & 17 as they are such splendid verses and I do not want to spoil them, but your homework for this week is to read, to think on them and then share our thoughts together to encourage one another. Realise Ruth uses covenant language from OT – God promising to be their God and they be His people. She'd learned a lot from Naomi over the years – probably from her life as well as her lips. Do we conduct our lives so as to commend our Saviour and God, even as we go through trials and difficulties, let alone the good and blessed times?

Those who are married can use these words of Ruth to refresh our marriage vows and commitment to our spouse – cleave to them 'til death do us part and we'll serve the Lord together as long as we both shall live. It will mean we will need to walk closely with Him as individuals within that marriage. It should be a pattern for us as Christians as we will cleave to Him whatever, will go where He would have us go and do what He would have us do. This God is our God – the personal pronoun 'my' is so important at it underscores **our own** individual personal relationship with Him and He with us in a covenant relationship that He will never ever break.

This relationship also brings us into God's people and family – we belong to a great and amazing spiritual family. We are to identify with them throughout history, the wide world over and especially in a local expression of that family – the local church where we are placed. None of us are designed to '*go it alone*' in the Christian life as we all need fellowship and teaching together with our brothers

and sisters in Christ – we are part of the body of Christ locally too. God’s ideal is for the body of the local church to grow and develop together and there should not be *‘the lone Christian’* who does things their way outside of and separate from the local church fellowship. These words of Ruth should be used in binding of ourselves one to the other in the bonds of love and fellowship as God’s people and we should be very careful to maintain the unity of the local body of Christ.

We are to seriously think through our commitment to the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, recognise the debt of love we owe Him and live to please Him in all areas of our life and the privilege and honour we have to belong to His people and commit ourselves to go on together with them and serve them as part of our service to Him, as we all progress together with the Lord.

We, like Naomi, may pass through hard, dark times which will not be easy, but like her, we may witness God doing great things through such dark painful times. In Ruth’s conversion and cleaving to Naomi we see His grace shown – not just to Naomi through Ruth and Boaz; but for a nation without a leader – a king would be provided; also, for the world in need of salvation – through Ruth’s descendants the Saviour of both Jews and Gentiles would come. As the old hymn says: *“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.”*

God has bigger things in view for us than we could ever imagine – ask Naomi!