

Till Death Do Us Part

Ruth 1:6-22

Introduction.

1). One of the joys of being a minister of Jesus Christ is having the privilege of performing weddings. After all, deciding who you will marry is the 2nd most important decision a person will ever make, after deciding whether or not they will trust Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. For me it is a real honor to be involved in the life of a couple during their premarital counseling, the rehearsal and the marriage ceremony.

2). Having performed and observed many marriages over the years, I always listen carefully to the exchange of vows and commitment. Almost always I hear words like “for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health; for better, for worse, till death do us part.” And sometimes, I also hear the bride voice in tender words a biblical text found in Ruth 1:16,

“For wherever you go, I will go;
And where you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people;
And your God my God.”

These are beautiful words, strong words, words of devotion and lifelong commitment. However, many people are surprised to learn that these words were not spoken by a bride to her husband, but by a daughter-in-law (Ruth) to her mother-in-law (Naomi). Following the deaths of all three men in their lives, Ruth, this Proverbs 31 lady, says to her mother-in-law “I will stay with you wherever you go, for better, for worse, till death do us part.” We seldom see this kind of devotion in our day. The fact is we seldom see this kind of devotion in any day.

Transition. Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion are dead. Naomi, Ruth and Orpah are left alone. Their future is bleak, it does not offer much, if any, hope. How should they respond? What should they do? What next?

I. Watch Your Decisions In Times of Distress.

1:6-13

- When you are tired or depressed, stressed out or about to go over the edge, be careful in your decisions. You are very vulnerable to making the wrong ones.
- The “Grim Reaper” has visited Naomi, Ruth and Orpah in Moab. The famine in Bethlehem paled in comparison to the famine experienced in Moab. They are down and out, and there is no hope on the horizon. Yet some decisions must be made, even if you don’t feel like making them. So **learn...**

1. Good Intentions May Not Lead to the Best Decisions.

1:6-10

- v. 6: Things are looking up b/c Bethlehem, the “house of bread,” again has bread. Why? The LORD (Yahweh) has visited (provided food for) His people. This is the 1st time the LORD is mentioned in Ruth. The LORD is providing for His people. Might He provide for Naomi?! She doesn’t think so!
- v. 7: The 3 women together head toward Bethlehem.

- v. 8-10: Naomi engages the 2 daughters-in-law in conversation. Her intentions no doubt are good, but her judgment is a bit clouded.
 - Go back to your mother (not father). A widow should stay with her mother, not her mother-in-law, seems to be her meaning.
 - She is willing to travel home alone. She has lost home, husband and sons. Now she adds a self-inflicted wound: she will go home alone.
 - She asked the Lord to “deal kindly” (NKJV; NASV), “show kindness” (NIV), “treat you graciously” (Peterson) Orpah and Ruth. The Hebrew word is *hesed*, a very important word in the Old Testament and one that will occur 3 times in Ruth (1:8; 2:20; 3:10). The word can mean covenantal loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, mercy, love (of an *agape* type!) and compassion. No one English word is capable of capturing the meaning. It is a word rooted in relationship, it is action oriented, enduring in its commitment, and completely voluntary. It is an act of extraordinary mercy or kindness that goes beyond the call of duty. The LORD is the one who models *hesed*, and over 2/3 of the word’s 245 occurrences are of God’s *hesed* to humans. And yet those who love God are to show *hesed* to others as well. Interestingly, the only humans in this book explicitly said to exercise *hesed* are Orpah (once) and Ruth (twice), both Moabites, not Hebrews! Orpah and Ruth have shown *hesed* to Naomi and her dead mean, and so she entreats Yahweh to do likewise for them.
 - She also asks the Lord to help them find another husband. She knows that in their world, security and well being are intimately connected to being related to a man (father, husband, brother, near relative).
 - They kiss, weep loudly, and the girls, giving further evidence of their *hesed* toward Naomi say, “No, we won’t go! We will stay with you.” At this point, the daughters-in-law show more faithfulness than Naomi, the Moabites and not the Hebrew. Naomi’s intentions are good, but sending the girls back to the land of Moab and the pagan god Chemosh is not the best decision.

2. **Great Logic May Not Lead to the Best Decisions.** **1:11-13**

- Naomi is not deterred. If passion will not dissuade her daughters-in-law, then maybe cold, hard logic will. Her reasoning really is flawless and her argument well packaged and stated
 - 1) Can I have more sons? No.
 - 2). Do I even have the prospect of a husband? No.
 - 3). Hypothetically, and humor me a bit, if I married tonight (miracle #1), and had sons tonight (miracle #2), would you wait until they were old enough to marry you? No.
 - 4). Now the clincher, is it wise for you to stay with someone who the LORD is against? NO. I am bad company, a cursed apple, pure and simple. Yahweh brought into my life famine, exile, widowhood and childlessness. Who knows what He has in store for me next? Indeed, who knows?!

- The phrase “the hand of the Lord has gone out against me” also appears in Ex. 9:3; Deut. 2:15 and Judges 2:15. There the Lord’s hands goes out against His enemy. Naomi feels that is her lot in life as well. The Lord is against me. The Lord is my enemy. Only a fool would be anywhere close to me. Go home! It breaks my heart to say it but that is best for all of us! God has a target and that target is me. On the surface she appears to have an argument. From a purely human perspective, her logic appears unchallengeable. But, where God is present and at work (note Naomi does not deny this!), great logic may not lead to the best decision. We must trust Him, even when we do not understand Him.

II. **Reveal Your Devotion With Steadfast Determination.** **1:14-18**

- Naomi’s argument sways the heart of Orpah. She again weeps, kisses her mother-in-law, and this time heads back home. We never see or hear of her again. However, Ruth’s response is altogether different. There is an unrelenting determination in her soul. They say, “it is a woman’s prerogative to change her mind.” Well, here is a woman whose mind will not be changed no matter what. What she does stands in stark contrast to Orpah. What she says shows greater faith than that of Naomi. What do we learn about godly, faithful devotion from this Gentile widow from Moab?

1. **Devotion Is Seen In What We Do.** **1:14-15, 18**

- v. 14: Orpah leaves but Ruth clings (implying absolute loyalty and genuine affection). It is the same expression found in Gen. 2:24 of a man leaving his father and mother and clinging to his wife.
- v. 15: Naomi points to the actions of Orpah as if to inspire and motivate Ruth to follow her. Look she is going to:
 - 1). her people--the Moabites;
 - 2). her gods—in particular Chemosh, a god who required the sacrifice of children as a burnt offering of his worship (2 Kings 3:27).
- Ruth, however, will not budge an inch. Verse 18 says, “she was determined to go with Naomi” (lit. “She made herself strong to go,” *NKJV*, marg. reading)

2. **Devotion Is Seen In What We Say.** **1:16-17**

- Ruth could do with her life what she did because of what she believed in her heart and determined with her will. Ruth confesses with her mouth what is in her heart. Verses 16-17 are 2 of the most beautiful and magnificent verses in all of the Bible, words given by a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law.
- These are the first words that we actually hear from the mouth of Ruth. Dan Block says, “they are among the most memorable in all of Scripture. Few utterances in the Bible match her speech for sheer poetic beauty, and the extraordinary courage and spirituality it exercises” (Block, 640).
- Here words begin with a strong plea [in the imperative] “Entreat me not (Urge me not, do not pressure me) to leave you or to turn back from following you.”
- Then follows a 3-fold declaration of her devotion and commitment to Naomi, set in Hebrew parallelism.
 - 1). “Wherever you go I will go” (north, south, east, west) and

- “Wherever you lodge I will lodge” (cave or cottage, palace of a king or tent of a pauper)
- 2). “Your people shall be my people (your nation my nation, your family, my family) and Your God my God.” In the family of Elimelech, and perhaps particularly in Naomi, she had seen the beauty and the majesty, the sovereignty and holiness, the faithfulness and compassion of Jehovah. She is no more a pagan nor will she be a secret worshipper.
 - 3). “Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried.”
It will be till death do us part.
- Finally, she invokes an oath calling upon Yahweh as a witness to her pledge. Her decision is for life. There will be no turning back on Naomi or her God!
 - Ruth’s faith is incredible! Her devotion without compare! Her commitment to Naomi transcends geographical location, racial origin, or national religion. Her conversion also reveals that the Lord’s salvation transcends the same! His mercy and grace, love and forgiveness is available to anyone, even a pagan Moabite, if they will turn to Him in faith.
 - Romans 10:13 reminds us that “whosoever call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Oh, did you know that same statement is in the Old Testament too (Joel 2:32)!

Transition. Naomi is all out of arguments, energy and probably patience. Verse 18 says when she saw the determination of Ruth, “she stopped speaking to her.” She is literally speechless in the face of such devotion. Who wouldn’t be?!

III. Guard Your Disposition Against Bitter Despair. 1:19-22

- Following the departure of Orpah and the stirring speech by Ruth, she and Naomi travel on to Bethlehem. Here they are met by surprise and shock, especially Naomi. She has been gone sometime, well over 10 years (cf. 1:4). Life has been tough, even cruel, and she shows the wear and tear of it not only in appearance, but also in attitude. Bitter despair owns her soul and she does not hesitate to say so. She again reveals, at this time, an inability to trust the hidden hand of God as He providentially works in the life of His children. In fact, she is quick to state that His hand is not hidden, it is heavy, and heavy against her.

Transition: In the process, she teaches us 2 significant lessons.

1. Do Not Forget Who Is For You. 1:19-22

- v. 19: All the town is abuzz (excited, stirred) with excitement. Naomi is back, or is she? Seeing her they said to one another, “Is the woman before us Naomi” (meaning “pleasant, beautiful, good”)?
- v. 20-21: Naomi quickly fires back with a creative play on her name. “Do not call me Naomi (pleasant one); call me Mara (bitter one)”. She follows up with a logic similar to that of v. 13, but with even greater intensity than before.

- 1). The Almighty (Shaddi, the one of/over the mountains) has dealt very bitterly with me. Shaddi has afflicted me, brought disaster and evil on me.
 - 2). I went out full (a husband, 2 sons) and Yahweh has returned me empty (what about Ruth?!).
 - 3). “Yahweh has testified against me.” The Lord, for whatever reason, and I know not what it is, has called me to account, declared me guilty and meted out the punishment.
 - 4). “Shaddai has afflicted me,” He has made me a target for his arrows, His cruise missiles zeroed in on my life and utterly destroyed it.
- v. 22: So this is the state of mind and heart in which Naomi returns. She was correct in who God is, but she failed to see how God works. She was blind to the fact that God, as Almighty, as the LORD, does indeed control all things, but He is also the God who brings blessing out of brokenness and joy out of sorrow.

Ecclesiastes 7:14—“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.”

Lamentations 3:37-38—“Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the most high that woe and well-being proceed?”

Isaiah 45:7—“I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.”

Amos 3:6—“If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?”

***Romans 8:28, 31**—“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

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

***Psalm 30:5**—“For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Transition: When we fail to see the big picture, the whole picture, and the One painting the picture, we can easily forget who is for us.

2. **Do Not Forget Who Is With You.**

1:19, 22

- Naomi forgot God was for her (after all she was His child). Naomi also forgot Ruth was with her. In all of her lamenting in vs. 19-22 she doesn't acknowledge Ruth even once. It is like she isn't even there and if she is, well so much the worse for it.
- Little did she know that this Moabitess (v. 22), this girl from Moab (v. 22) would turn her brokenness to blessedness, her emptiness to fullness.
- In Exodus 15:23-25, the children of Israel saw God turn bitter water into sweet by casting a tree into the waters. In time Naomi will see God turn a bitter life into a sweet life by using a woman named Ruth.

Conclusion: From “Friends Pay Tribute to Newsman With Their Own Stories” (April 16, 2003), by Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post*—

They came from television, the statehouse and Washington to St. Patrick's Cathedral to bid farewell to a 39-year-old reporter described here today as the "Ernie Pyle of his generation."

The tributes to David Bloom's life and journalistic exploits were moving, but what left the packed pews in stunned silence was a final e-mail to his wife, from the battlefield in Iraq, in which the NBC correspondent seemed to have a premonition of his own death.

"Here I am, supposedly at the peak of professional success, and I could frankly care less," Bloom wrote April 4, hours before his death from a pulmonary embolism. "Yes, I'm proud of the good job we've all been doing, but in the scheme of things it matters little compared to my relationship with you, the girls and Jesus."

He told his wife, Melanie, to save the note, and if in the future "you're talking about my last days," she and their three daughters should know that "he gave every ounce of his being not for himself but for those who he cared about most, God and his family... You cannot know now whether you will look back on it with tears, heartbreak and a sense of anguish and regret over what might have been."

- To Melanie Bloom and their 3 precious daughter, like Naomi, God says, "Don't forget who is for you. Don't forget who is with you."
- "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy (a shout of joy) comes in the morning."