

Ruth 1:10-14

Naomi has made a decision to return to the land of Bethlehem. Orpah and Ruth accompany her part of the way and we read of their tearful farewells. Naomi shares her desire of blessing upon her two daughters in law as they each return to their own families. The expectation is that Naomi will continue through the desert to Bethlehem and Orpah and Ruth will go back into Moab. They will be separated, and most likely never see each other again. This separation is very different than what we might experience today! There are no phones, no computers with Facebook or Instagram, and no regular mail delivery, just word of mouth. However, the parting does not go as expected!

Ruth 1:10 And they said to her, "[No,] but we will surely return with you to your people."

Orpah and Ruth assure their mother in law that they intend to break tradition and accompany Naomi to Bethlehem. You can hear them saying, 'Of course we are not going back to Moab, and we had always planned on remaining with you'. Their response continues to give us insight into the special relationship of these women. The care and love that has built between them is evident. Somehow, the pull to stay with Naomi has become stronger than the desire to reside within their own homeland and relatives. Even when it means a greater opportunity for care and security. Remember there is a chasm of difference between the culture and teaching of Naomi's birth land of Bethlehem and her daughters in law birth land of Moab. One was taught to follow Jewish law and the God of Israel; the others were brought up in a land known for its worship of many gods and pagan sacrifices. The young women have been drawn away from what they knew and drawn into the graciousness shown by Naomi.

We have the benefit of the whole story – isn't it fun to see how God uses all circumstances for His glory in bringing people to Himself? Are we encouraging others to be drawn toward the God of the Bible as they interact with us? The next few verses give us Naomi's response to her daughters in law and a picture into her burdened heart.

Ru 1:11 But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

Naomi challenges the decision made by Orpah and Ruth to stay on with her. In fact, it almost seems like Naomi is warning the young women to turn back. The word 'return' is used repeatedly in the next several verses as Naomi urges her daughters in law to consider their only real option. Naomi asks them why they would journey with her since she is unable to offer them hope for the future. We have to remember once again a women's position in that time – a man meant security, food, and shelter. Naomi is not in a position to bear more children and she most likely considers herself too old to be married again. Under Jewish law, if there had been a brother of Mahlon or Chilion, he then would have redeemed the young widow's. But, this is not the case.

Deuteronomy 25:5 "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be [married] outside [the family] to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

Even after having been removed from Jewish culture and law, we see Naomi following what she knew. This may be a testament of her strong desire to continue in her obedience to the God she has known. Perhaps she had even been instructing her daughters in law in the Jewish religion all along. Orpah and Ruth see an example of faithfulness in Naomi. Faithfulness to her people and faithfulness to her God.

Naomi realizes the difficulties that lie ahead of her. The journey to Bethlehem would be exhausting. Without benefit of male companions it would be even more challenging. Then when Naomi does arrive in Bethlehem, she is without her husband and needs to secure shelter and food for herself from family members who still reside there. She is well aware that her survival in Bethlehem will depend on gleaning the fields with the poor, fatherless, and needy. Naomi has compassion for her daughters in law and must wonder if they truly understand the choice they are making. Life in Bethlehem will not be easier, in fact, it may be very difficult. She is not even certain of her own future, never mind securing a future for her daughters. What a helpless feeling!

Transport yourself for a moment. Think of having lived in a foreign country for about ten years, experiencing the loss of your husband and only two sons, journeying back to the country you left and perhaps bringing the two women who have been the closest part of family for the last several years, into an unknown situation. You would feel responsible for their welfare, yet would be unable to make any promises of a bright future to them. I can only begin to imagine the difficult choices being made. Maybe Naomi's tone of despair comes from wanting her daughters in law to truly understand the hardship they might be prolonging upon themselves if they chose to accompany her. The only thing Naomi has to offer is her commitment and love to God and the people of Israel. This is more than enough if you are truly devoted to God and trust in Him. For Naomi, this is the best decision, this is where she belongs, and she can count on God upholding her.

But where are Orpah and Ruth's hearts in this matter? Have they learned to turn from their heathen God's to the one true God of Israel? Is their trust in Him one which will cause them to leave the possibility of comforts and security found in their families? What about when it becomes even more difficult, do they have a faith that will sustain them or will they regret the decision to follow Naomi?

In Ruth 1:12-13 we continue to read Naomi's response to her daughters in law as she appeals to their sense of reality and understanding.

Ruth 1:12-13 "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me."

Naomi once again tells her daughters in law to return to their own land with their own families. She continues to warn them of a road wrought with difficulties, maybe in an effort to test their resolve to follow her into Bethlehem. It even seems she is being a bit sarcastic in stating the obvious and impossible. She is old, will probably not marry and even if she did and was able to conceive immediately and have a son, it would be years before he could carry out Jewish law and marry one of them! This scenario is unrealistic, impractical and unfortunately begins to express the hopelessness and bitterness Naomi feels in her circumstances. I think my words would be something like, "Seriously, I don't even know if I am going to be able to take care of myself, let alone you younger women who still have the hope of a future".

Read what *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* says about Ruth 1:12-13, "That Naomi should dissuade her daughters-in-law so strongly from accompanying her to the land of Israel may appear strange. But it was the wisest and most prudent course for her to adopt: first, because they might be influenced by hopes which could not be realized; second, because they might be led, under temporary excitement, to take a step they might afterwards regret; and, third, because the sincerity and strength of their conversion to the true religion, which she had taught them, would be thoroughly tested".

Naomi could have just responded with, 'Oh sure, everything will be just fine, it will all work out'. Ultimately, when our faith is placed in God, we understand this to be true. **Yet, is the whole picture represented well? What does 'everything will be just fine' convey?** Often, the road of our faith has twists and turns and hills and valleys in it. Sometimes the journey we are on proves to be really hard! It is prudent to prepare for times of difficulty so we are not caught off-guard. Perhaps this is what Naomi is thinking for her daughters in law – preparing them for the journey ahead by reminding them of the hardships they are likely to encounter.

2Corinthians 4:8-9 [we are] afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

Romans 8:17-18 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with [Him] in order that we may also be glorified with [Him.] ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Psalms 119:50 This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me.

Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Hebrews 6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a [hope] both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

The importance of embracing reality also causes me to think upon how we share our faith. Consider this. **What happens when faith is presented only as God's love bestowing wonderful gifts on His children with multiple blessings and promises for a delightful future and no worries or trials or wants? When it gets difficult, how can this kind of faith sustain you? It won't, it can't! Do we share only one side of God – His love – without sharing the full truth of God – His judgement upon sin and the payment and trials that go along with His judgement?**

Do we embrace God only when things are going well? What is the basis of our faith – is it built on truth, is it sustained with truth?

Although Naomi shows genuine concern for her daughters in law, she is feeling her own distress at the difficult circumstances surrounding her. Even to the point of wondering out loud that God's hand is against her. When things go really south for us, we can easily allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the conditions surrounding us rather than assured by God's care keeping us.

Job expressed his sorrow much the same way in Job 19:21, "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me". In the book of Psalms, David says he felt God's heavy hand against him. Psalm 32:4 For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away [as] with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

God's hand can feel heavy upon us at times. We may be suffering the consequences of poor decisions we personally have made, or God, in His love, has chosen to allow circumstances in our lives that cause us to learn to trust Him more. Naomi may be wondering if hardship has come her way because of the family's decision to move to Moab years before. Whatever the cause of our trials, we can make choices. If we are in error, we need to confess and make changes appropriate to honoring God. If we are unable to recognize specific sin that is causing our difficulty, we need to trust that God in His sovereignty knows what He has allowed for His glory to be manifested in our lives.

What is your reaction to difficulty and hardship? How can you continue to find peace and joy when you are feeling heavy-hearted? How can you encourage someone going through great difficulty?

We can almost hear the hopelessness in Naomi's words. She is so downtrodden that there doesn't seem to be anything she can do to help her daughters in law. God has stripped almost everything away from her. In Ruth 1:12 it says Naomi is grieved by the dire situation she is in. Consider her relationship again with the two younger women. They are more than just acquaintances, they have become family with affections toward one other. Naomi is unable to invite the women to accompany her with any hope of a guarantee for a better life. She is also acutely aware that as she sends them back to their own relatives, their instruction in the Jewish law and the God of Israel will likely cease. This would be heartbreaking for any of us!

Next week we will look at a heart touched by God and prepared for His call.