

Ruth 1:6-22

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. We looked this morning as an introduction to the book of Ruth at its purpose within the canon of Scripture and saw that centrally this book displays to us the faithfulness of God.

The book of Ruth shows us the faithfulness of a God who is working out in the minutest details of life His plans for salvation.

We saw His faithfulness resounding in the midst of our experiences, specifically in the midst of our experiences of widespread disaster, of personal tragedy, and of human sinfulness.

That in the midst of each, God remains on the throne of this world and continues to work all things in accordance with His purposes for His glory.

We concluded in verse 6 with Naomi rising and returning to her homeland where God in His faithfulness, grace, and mercy had visited His people with food.

[1 : 1 9] They didn't deserve it. They didn't earn it. But God in His faithfulness has looked on them again. The house of bread, Bethlehem, once again had bread to spare.

And it was the time of the barley harvest. We ended with an invitation to rise and return to this faithful God ourselves.

As we keep in mind God's faithfulness, working out in the minutest details of life His plans for salvation, and showing favor to those who don't deserve it, and as we remember that we are supposed to be reflecting this character in our own lives, our question will be tonight, to what extent are we to be faithful?

And it is my hope that we leave here tonight prepared to be faithful over all earthly securities. That at the end of the day, we would rather put our confidence in God and His chosen King, Jesus Christ, and follow wherever He leads us, than take refuge in the fleeting pleasures of this world, or any protection that it claims to offer.

Or, intriguingly, we will have as our example, one who was not considered part of the people of God, the outsider, to show us what such faithfulness looks like.

[2 : 5 7] As we journey with these women on their way back to Bethlehem, we will see how faithfulness ought to take precedence over all earthly securities.

And we'll look at three such securities. The security of one's circumstances, the security of one's future, and the security of one's company.

Three securities that faithfulness is to take precedence over. First, faithfulness over the security of one's circumstances.

Or another way of saying it, we ought to be faithful both to God and to others before seeking comfort in our present situation. Naomi says to her two daughters-in-law in verse 8, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.

[4 : 05] Naomi's first of three pleas for her daughters-in-law to return to their homeland centers on their seeking comfort in the best of their present circumstances.

There wasn't much left for these two widowed and apparently barren women. And yet there was a little hope if they would turn back to what was left of their family ties.

In the patriarchal society in which this story took place, it would have been typical to refer to returning to the houses or the homes of their fathers.

But by releasing both Ruth and Orpah back to the houses of their mothers, Naomi was saying something very particular.

She was releasing them to remarry. One's home was only referred to as one's mother's home when it was directly connected to the act of uniting oneself with another in marriage.

[5 : 11] Now, why the mother is associated with marriage? Imagination doesn't take too long to draw the connection. Matchmakers and such, they just tend to be better at that.

That's okay. You can here think of Isaac, one of the patriarchs of the Bible, who after the death of his mother, it says, brought Rebecca into the tent of his mother to become his wife.

This is how they referred to it. Naomi was, in calling them to return to their mother's homes, was releasing them to remarry, to find security in their mother's home as far as it would lead to a husband's home as the means of guaranteeing and in some way redeeming their present circumstances.

Yet even after invoking the Lord to deal kindly with them, to be relationally faithful to them as they had been to her and her sons, they still refuse to turn back.

Her farewell kiss in verse 9 is met only with weeping and refusal. Their faithfulness to her outweighs their concern for the security of their present circumstances.

[6 : 36] The question for us is, would we have done the same? Would we have trusted God to take care of us?

It wouldn't have been wrong to return to their homeland. The author doesn't paint it as a negative thing. It's just that the demonstration of relational faithfulness is painted in such a positive light that returning home pales in comparison to it.

I know for myself that panic attacks used to come in pretty rapid succession one after another when our bank accounts would drop below a comfortable level.

At those points, I'd rather not say all the options, right, that I came up with on how to get back to comfortable.

It's times like those that prove one's character. Is my faithfulness grounded enough to withstand such shifts in my present circumstances?

[7 : 53] Is yours. Will we, in those volatile moments, remain faithful to our God and to those who He's put in our lives?

By the grace of God, such moments not only test our faithfulness, but build in us a faithfulness that will stand fast. Both Ruth and Orpah refused to turn back from their mother-in-law to find security elsewhere.

They refused to allow Naomi to return to her homeland alone and to make the journey by herself to no certain end.

Over the security of their own circumstances, they reflected the character of God and remained faithful. Would you?

Would I? Yet beyond the security of one's circumstances, faithfulness ought to likewise take precedence over the security of one's future.

- [9 : 07] Though some of us may, in a moment of uncharacteristic faithfulness, withstand the dismal outlook of present situations, thinking perhaps that circumstances are bound to change sometime soon, many of us would fold if our future was painted just as black.
- Yet faithfulness ought to take precedence over the security of one's future as well. A study was done recently on what keeps people going when times are tough.
- Whether it's economic instability or national unrest or personal turmoil, the one difference this study found between those who give up and those who keep going, those who fold under the pressure was hope.
- Hope. Hope in a future. Hope in future change. Hope in some light at the end of a tunnel of blackness. Naomi's second plea for her daughters-in-law to return home centers on their futures.
- She says with all tenderness, yet still as firm as could be, in verse 11, return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands?
- [10 : 38] Is there any future hope for you if you remain with me? Again, she says in verse 12, return home, my daughters.
- Go your way. For even if I had tonight a husband and then gave birth to sons, it would be another 20 years before they could take you as their wives.
- Would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No. No. And what's more, in verse 13, she explains that she sees her entire misfortune as from the hand of the Lord.
- It is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has gone out against me. You want a future? Don't hang out with me. Mine's already been painted as black as could be by the God who was supposed to be taking care of me.
- She is telling them there is no future hope. if you return with me. So the one weeps and goes.
- [11 : 51] But what of Ruth? This outsider clings to her. It's interesting how the different languages describe this.
- In Hebrew, the language that this was originally written in, the word is divak, to cling to. It's the same word that's used in Genesis when it says a man is to leave his family and cling to his wife.
- Here's Naomi telling her, go find another husband to cling to. Go find another husband. But in faithfulness, Ruth clings to Naomi.
- It's why this passage is used in wedding ceremonies a lot. Because Ruth is about to voice what it means to cling to one another.
- In Greek, when the Greeks translated this, they said that Orpah turned back, but Ruth followed. And surely that's what it means by saying she clung to Naomi.
- [13 : 04] But interestingly, the word is a little more profound than that. Because this is the word that's used over and over and over again to describe what it means to shadow someone.
- To become their follower. When Jesus calls his disciples, he calls them to follow him. It's the same word. To walk in his way.
- To become his shadow. And do what he does. And act as he acts. And say what he's said. Not a bad picture of faithfulness.
- Living as one's shadow. Taking one's future and lining it up with the path someone else has already walked. Not a bad picture of faithfulness.
- Do you think we could have done the same? When the stock market first began to dip, some might have gotten scared. But not many panicked.

[14 : 10] A blip in the quarterly earnings would hardly go noticed. Yet when it took a nosedive, and all of a sudden people's IRAs were worthless, and retirement seemed next to impossible for the next 150 years, when the future was uncertain, people began to scramble.

Within such adversity, when not only the present looks as dusk, but when the future looks as night, it is then that our character proves true or not.

How do we react to the uncertainty of our future? Faithfulness.

Faithfulness is to take precedence over even that. Lastly, though, we find that Naomi pleads with her remaining daughter-in-law to return to her homeland because her sister-in-law was already on her way.

Verse 15 says, Look, said Naomi, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her. Yet Ruth, remaining faithful over the security of her circumstances, over the security of her future, remains faithful over the security of her company.

[15 : 48] faithfulness over the security of one's company. I want you for a moment to picture in your mind's eye a bridge.

Can you remember a time reprimanding a child, or if you are a child, even if you're a grown-up child, being reprimanded for following the example of a friend?

At some point, the question probably was posed, if they jumped off a bridge, would you do it too? And I want to just take a moment to reverse the imagery because as a kid, my parents had the hard job of raising the one who would jump off the bridge and would do it first and became the example in every other parent's reprimanding of their child.

So I want to flip the imagery. As a philosophy student at university, one of the conclusions I came to is that Christianity is not fideism.

Fide being Latin for faith, fideism being a religion of blind faith. Our religion is not an unfounded leap of faith.

[17 : 15] There are reasons we believe what we believe. God does not ask us to jump off the bridge of faith. Yet he does ask us to jump off the bridge of faithfulness.

And more so to jump even if there was no one else jumping with us. here Naomi points to Orpah and asks Ruth, why don't you follow your sister-in-law?

Just walk away from the bridge of faithfulness. There's no reason to jump. No one else is doing it. Why would you?

Why would you? But Ruth jumps. Ruth jumps without hesitation. Ruth jumps with such certainty that her declaration of faithfulness has become one of the most remarkable statements of personal fidelity in all of Scripture ever to have been said, ever to have been spoken, ever to have been penned.

in verse 16 she begins, don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.

[18 : 45] Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. In life, I am with you. Your people will be my people.

And your God, my God, I will be bound in faithfulness both to your people and to your God. Where you die, I will die.

And there will I be buried till death do us part. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me over the security of my circumstances, over the security of my future, and over the security of the company of this world.

I will be faithful both to you and to your God. And to this, finally, Naomi has nothing else to say.

Says when she sees that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing. we read in verse 19 that the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

[20 : 10] And when they arrived, the beauty of Ruth's declaration of personal fidelity, of faithfulness is drowned out by the faithless moaning of Naomi who sees God as the one out to get her, even enough for her to call for a change of her name.

no longer will she be called Naomi, meaning pleasantness, but she will be called Mara, meaning bitterness. Her life is defined as one bitter existence.

As she says in verse 21, I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. We began today, today we ended this morning in verse six, where God's faithfulness was heard again in his visiting his people and giving them food.

And we will end in verse 22 with his faithfulness, working out in the details of life his plans for salvation. there we read, so Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem, as it happened by chance, as the barley harvest was beginning.

In God's providential timing, he brings these two widowed women back to the fields of Bethlehem. And it just happens to be in time for the barley harvest.

[21 : 47] And Ruth just happens to end up in a field of a man who would care for her. And he just happens to be available. And they just happen to fall in love.

And a lot more just happens. Or does it? If you don't know the story, or even if you do, it's worth a read-through with a lens that's looking for God's hand in it all.

If you want to read through it this week, look for what just happens. But we need to leave tonight recognizing that there's a contrast to be made and to find ourselves in.

But the contrast for most of us is not between Ruth and Orpah, I would expect. If you haven't made the decision to bind yourself to God, the one true living God, and to his people, rather than return to the cheap gods of this world, I'd suppose that you haven't taken seriously the weight of life.

Or perhaps under its weight you found ways of skirting the issue. And I'd commend to you, if that's descriptive of you, I'd commend to you to take a vacation.

[23 : 16] Go away for a week. But while you're away, go somewhere for a week and stare life in the face and ask what it's all about and who's going to save you in the end.

Because you can't save yourself. if the contrast for you is between Ruth and Orpah, go ask the big questions of life.

It's more important than going to work tomorrow. Because you've got to choose who you're going to follow, whose shadow you're going to be.

But for many of us who've made the decision to follow, the contrast isn't between Orpah and Ruth. The contrast is between Naomi and Ruth.

At least at this point in the story. In rising and returning to our God, will we do so in bitterness or will we do so in faithfulness?

[24 : 23] And if you see your life as one marked by bitterness, if you're angry all the time because things aren't going your way and you feel like you're the only one doing anything for the kingdom and you're just looking for more things to do so that you can be more angry, the last thing I want to tell you tonight is to try harder to be faithful.

That's the last thing I want. I don't want to tell you to try harder to be faithful. You know why? Trying will make you more bitter.

It's the paradox of it all. Working your way into a place where you try harder to be more faithful, in your attempts to be more faithful, you will become more bitter.

You know when I'm at my worst? When I'm trying my hardest. You know when I'm at my best? Not when I'm trying, but when I'm transfixed.

When I'm transfixed on the faithfulness of God. If you find yourself faltering in life, failing your family, failing your friends, faithless, bitter in everything you're doing, because faithfulness isn't just about what you spend your time doing, it's about how you do it.

[26 : 01] If you're faithless, both in terms of how you relate to God, and faithless in how you relate to others, if your life is defined by bitterness, that you could use a name change right now.

I want to commend to you. start asking the questions. What's happened to where I'm looking?

Why am I not transfixed on God? What happened that I started to think more that this world was about me than about him?

More about what I can do and I'm doing than about what he's already done and is doing and will do. I want to suggest to you that the answer to faithlessness is one of faith.

Trust. Trusting that your present circumstances are not defined by what you see around you, not defined by your present situation, but by what has been sealed for you and is presently abiding in heaven next to the Father.

[27 : 26] faith, trusting that your future is not determined by what you can see, but by what you cannot see, and is unperturbed by what is seen.

I want to suggest to you that faithfulness hinges on believing, trust, faith in the company you keep with the living God, not with the world around you.

I think the place to begin when bitterness sets in is to ask why you are not captivated by Christ.

Christ. We could have concluded, we can conclude tonight, we could have concluded by singing any number of songs, but I don't want the song that we sing to distract from this, I want it to enhance it, and what better picture that's more familiar than the one painted in Psalm 23, of our good shepherd, both God, our good shepherd, and Christ his son, our good shepherd.

So when we sing this, thinking in terms of, are we faithful, am I faithful, will I be faithful, or will my life be one of faithlessness and bitterness, while we sing this, I hope that you are not distracted too much by yourself, but that you find yourself transfixed.

[29 : 19] on God, his character, what he's done, what he will do for you as our good shepherd. So we're going to sing from Psalm 23 in Sing Psalms on page 28 to the tune of Tarawathi.

Psalm 23. Would you stand and sing and remember God as we do? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.