

RUTH 1:6-18

INTRODUCTION

Let me just remind you of the story so far. Naomi had moved to Moab with her husband, Elimelech and their two sons Mahlon and Kilion. They had left Bethlehem, which means the house of bread because there was a famine in the land. Elimelech brought his family into pagan Moab, a move that turned out to be very costly indeed. Elimelech died in Moab, his two sons married Moabite women in direct violation of God's express command (Deut 7:2-3).

Eventually both Mahlon and Kilion died leaving Naomi, Orpah and Ruth destitute. That is where we left the story last time.

1. NAOMI'S DECISION

After being in Moab for ten years Naomi heard that the Lord was once again blessing his people by providing for them. Obviously even though Naomi was in Moab she kept in touch with her homeland, and the fact that God is providing food once again indicates as I said last week that the famine was God's judgment upon the people just as the provision is the Lord's blessing upon the people. As a result of God coming to the aid of his people Naomi and her Daughter in Law prepare to return home. She should never have been away from home Naomi with Elimelech should have trusted God in the midst of the famine but the Lord does not allow her to stay away for ever and so through various circumstances God deals with Naomi in order to get her to return home. She simply is left with no other option here, it is either to go home or stay and be destitute.

The Lord is clearly dealing with Naomi, in order to get her back to where she should be he has to remove from her, her husband and sons, the very people that she would have depended upon to provide for her. The Lord left her in such a situation that it seems from a human perspective she was left with no other option. But to be fair to Naomi it seems that her heart was still in Bethlehem, otherwise she would not have heard the news that the Lord has come to the aid of his people.

She was looking for a way to return and now the Lord has opened the door wide for her. This is often how the Lord has to deal with us. It might be that spiritually we leave the place we ought to be with the Lord, it might be that as a result of our drifting from the Lord that we drift from his people and from his church. There are many ways that the Lord deals with us but however God decides to deal with us we can rest assured that his dealings are always wise and loving. O they might not seemed like that at the time and I am sure that Naomi did not see God's hand as loving and kind in fact she says his dealings with her has made her life bitter (v 20). The writer to the Hebrews says that discipline does not seem to be good at the time but ultimately it is for our good (Hebrews 12:5-11). Even though the Lord's hand has been heavy upon Naomi by the end of this book we will be able to see how God's discipline upon her was for her ultimate good.

When we drift from the Lord spiritually and no one might know that we are drifting but when we do drift the Lord's dealings with us might seem to be severe they might seem to be bitter but we must always remember that they are for our ultimate good. We might not be able to see the Lord's good hand, but we simply must trust Him in every situation even the most bitterest situation, for his word declares that His providence in our lives is always for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28).

The good news is that he is intimately involved in our lives he does not leave us to our own devices even when we wander from Him or take a course of action that will lead us far from the Lord, He is involved in all our situations and as we saw last week he is working his purposes out through the good and bad decisions that we make.

Naomi's decision effected Orpah and Ruth it was now decision time for them, where they going to go back with Naomi or stay in their homeland? At first their decision seems clear for we read that they set out with Naomi on the road that led to Judah (v 7). Naomi must have been a good and kind woman for these two ladies were prepared to leave their homeland and their families and go to a completely strange land with a strange religion just for the sake of Naomi.

Naomi knew how hard it was going to be for Orpah and Ruth so she urges them to go back to their own families. She acknowledges that they have been kind to their husbands and to Naomi (v 8). She even prays that the Lord will be kind to them and grant them another husband who can look after them (v 9). But both Orpah and Ruth were determined to go with Naomi (v 10). Once again Naomi tries to persuade them to go home to their families and she gives them very good reasons for doing so (vs.11-13).

But what is Naomi doing here, did she not want them to come with her, did she not want them to become worshippers of the true God did she not want to save them from the idolatry of Moab? I think the answer to those questions is that Naomi wanted them to come with her but only if they realised what was involved. She is seeking to spell out the implications for them; if they are going to go to Judah she wants them to come not through some emotional attachment to her but because they believe this is right. To go to Judah would involve a whole new lifestyle and a whole new religion. No one worshipping the gods of Moab was welcome in Judah so Naomi is saying unless you are prepared to leave your own way of life and your old gods and in faith cling to a new way of life with a new God then unless you are prepared to do that you would be better going home to your families in Moab, and finding a husband who will continue in the worship of the gods of Moab.

What Naomi is saying is that coming with me means that you are claiming conversion. No longer is Moab your home and no longer is "Chemosh" your god but Judah will be your home and Jehovah will be your God. Orpah was persuaded to go back to Moab to her family and to her gods (vs. 14-15). O she had a real fondness and affection for Naomi and her God but she had a greater affection for Moab and its gods.

However what a contrast we have with Ruth here she could not be persuaded to go back to Moab (v 14). She will attach herself to Naomi to Naomi's people and to Naomi's God. In doing so she is leaving behind her old way of life and her old gods and is now committed to her new way of life to her new people and to her new God. This was not based upon a better future there simply was no guarantee that life would get any better for her, she had food in Moab and her future prospects of finding another husband and having children who could look after her in her old age were ten times better in Moab than in Judah. But she has been persuaded and convinced probably by the faith of Naomi that Judah's God is the true God the one worth following whatever the future held for her.

Ruth's statement of faith is one of the most precious statements in all the Scriptures. She is in faith committing herself to the true God and in doing so is of course committing herself to Naomi (vs.16-17). If we contrast this with Orpah who although very fond of Naomi and had a great affection for her she has a greater affection for her homeland and her people in Moab. She was probably impressed with the faith of Naomi and with Naomi's God but she was not prepared to leave her own gods in order to follow the one true god.

Whereas Ruth is prepared to give up everything to leave her past life, and her past gods in order to cling to Naomi and to Naomi's God. We see this contrast in today's world, there are people who are affected by the gospel message they become quite fond of Christian people but at the end of the day when a decision has to be made between their sin and Christ and between their life without Christ and life with Christ then they simply are not prepared to pay the cost and give up

their sin and their past. However if we are going to become committed to Christ then we all need to display the faith that Ruth displayed. A faith that was willing to give up her past to leave her family and friends and culture and gods in order to cling to Christ and in order to be committed to Christ's people. Jesus highlighted the cost in following Christ in Matthew 10:37-39 where the choice is clear; either Christ or others will be our first love but not both.

This is a challenge that continues to come to us even as Christian people. There is a cost to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus a cost that involves putting Christ before our families and friends. It is a sad reflection upon the church of Jesus Christ that we often need to be reminded of the cost for far too often it is the other way around. It is our families or job or hobbies before the things of God. But true and genuine conversion and daily discipleship does involve a cost every day we have to decide between Christ and something else.

Even simple things like reading our bibles and prayer instead of watching the TV or reading our novel are choices that everyday we must make and in making those various decisions we demonstrate our commitment to our God.

But although Ruth was paying a cost to go with Naomi she was also making some great gains. She was gaining a new people for Ruth says 'your people will be my people' (v. 16). She will no longer classify herself as belonging to the people of Moab but as belonging to the people of God. Likewise when we become followers of Jesus Christ there is a cost to be paid sacrifices to be made but there are also great gains. We become members in God's family; we inherit new brothers and sisters in Christ.

We not only have a new family in this country but we have new families all over the world who love the same God that we love. We have a people who are committed to the same God that we are committed too and therefore we belong to a people who are committed to us.

Not only do we gain a new family but a new God. Ruth says 'your God will be my God.' (v.16) The gods that we once worshipped the ones that could not hear or act because they did not exist except in our own minds are gone for good. We have a God who loves us and demonstrated how much he loved us by sending his Son to die for us. We have a God who treats us not as our sins deserved but with mercy and grace. We belong to a God who hears us and speaks to us through the word of the living God.

We belong to a God who does not abandon us but one who is committed wholeheartedly to us. Who is all-powerful and controls all things so that his purposes are carried out. Who is personally involved in every aspect of our lives. Yes we are a privilege people, O there is a cost but O how much we gain as a result of committing ourselves to this God. We not only have a new people and a new God but we also gain a new future.

Ruth says that 'where you die I will die.' (v. 17) In other words she is saying there is no going back wherever this commitment leads me I will go the whole way. When we come to Christ in faith then we are gaining a whole new future. We may not always know what that future holds; for me I never expected to be in England serving the Lord, but committing ourselves to Christ is signing ourselves up to a whole new future. You have no idea where God will take you or where you will eventually die.

But of course it's not just in this life that we have a new future but of course when this life comes to an end then we have a future home in heaven, a home which lasts forever. O I hope you see that although Ruth was giving up much and was paying a cost she was gaining so much more. If we are Christians then we too gave up certain things but O we have gained so much more.

But perhaps you are not a Christian. Then let me tell you that to become one involves a cost. There will be things that you will have to give up, there will be people who will give you up and you will have to abandon the gods that you have been trusting in. But O you will gain a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a new people and a certain future. You need to think this through, I will not make it easy for you by telling you there is no cost to pay.

But O I will encourage you to pay that cost to repent and believe in order that you might gain Christ and all benefits that come from knowing him.

Amen