

## Ruth, The Heroine of Love.

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Text: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land." Ruth I:1.

This book of Ruth is an oasis in the desert, a fragrant rose in the midst of many thorns. "The days when the judges ruled," which marked the close of the Book of Judges, gives us the blackest chapter in the history of Israel. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes," and as a result every man did wrong. Anarchy held high carnival.

In the midst of this desert of evil we come upon a garden of home life. Always hope for a people so long as the family life is kept pure. No man can completely run away from the influences of a good home, and it may be, after all, that God is more interested in the private affairs of people than he is in great public events. The greatest tragedies are heart tragedies. The great battle fields of earth may not be Marathon and Austerlitz, but the kitchen and the nursery. The unseen conflicts of soul may interest God and the angels more than booming cannon or marching armies. Certainly the bread question is the burning issue of all ages. The battle for bread has no truce, and the great army of bread winners have few furloughs.

Abimelech and his wife Naomi live with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilian, in Bethlehem, "the house of bread," but famine has made the name a misnomer. The drought or the marauders have cut off the crops, and the people are in want. It is easier to run away from the difficulties of making a living than to remain and surmount them. The land of Moab is the enemies' country, but it has bread, and bread just now is the important matter. The sacredness of home, the associations of childhood, the promises of God are all forgotten in the pressing want for bread. To repent of sin which brought the famine, and turn to God for supplies is not thought of. To attempt to better one's condition by change of environment does not always succeed. It is specially dangerous to leave the land of promise because for the time being it is not a land of plenty. Some people forsake the church for the world because the church is not what they would like it to be; it does not give them what they want. Israel lusted for the flesh pots of Egypt while the manna from heaven was falling about them. The manna was given, but it was not to their taste, which had been vitiated by eating Egyptian onions and garlick. They were dissatisfied, not because the manna failed to supply their needs, but because it did not gratify their lusts.

What we want is not always what we need. God has promised to supply "all our needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," but He has not promised to satisfy our selfish desires.

We are not told that there was an exodus from Bethlehem to Moab. Others remained and survived the famine. They were willing to bear the punishment for their sins until God should see fit to relieve them. They doubtless suffered, but they were willing to suffer rather than to forsake their land for the enemy's country. It is better in the long run to bear evil and surmount the difficulties we have brought upon ourselves, than try to escape them by flight. Abimelech really fled from a lesser evil to a greater. He escaped suffering by famine to find death by disease. His short cut to prosperity was the nearest way to adversity. In saving his life he lost it, and the lives of his two sons. In his attempt to protect his family from want he led them into the direst distress. By marrying his sons to heathen women he disobeyed God, and the result was sorrow for all. Naomi, now a widow and childless, finds herself in a foreign land, lonely and impoverished. Her heart turns to her home, and she determines to go back.

Thus God often uses sorrow to bring us to the way of obedience. If the darkness turn us to the light, thank God for darkness. If sorrow make us seek the sanctuary, sorrow is a minister of mercy. If poverty leads us back to God's house, poverty is our enrichment. Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem alone brings Ruth before us as the heroine of love, who in her hearty devotion illustrates what our love for Christ should be.

I. WE SEE LOVE SYMPATHIZING WITH LOVE. The hearts of Naomi and Ruth have been fused into one heart in the furnace of affliction. They have suffered together, and now it is a relief to weep together. Tears are the safety valve of the soul. Elizabeth Browning wrote:

"Bless God, all ye who suffer not  
More grief than ye can weep over."

If the hot furnace of our grief be not cooled by falling tears, it will soon consume us.

II. THERE IS LOVE CLEAVING TO LOVE. Naomi urges Orpah and Ruth not to go with her, on the ground that she could not furnish them with a husband, whereupon Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns.



Like some young women of the present day she seems to have thought that marriage was the most important thing in the world, and we may excuse one who has been happily married from shrinking from the loneliness of widowhood. Let it be said just here that the traditional joke about the disagreeableness and selfishness of mothers-in-law does not apply to Naomi. Like most mothers-in-law of today she was gentle, kind and loving, anxious to do the best she could for those whom her sons had loved. Ruth did not kiss Naomi a second time, but she "clave unto her." The silent cleaving, doubtless, pleased Naomi better than the affectionate kiss. To give a token of love is not like giving oneself.

And now Naomi adds another reason for Ruth's return. She may follow her sister's example, and go back to her people and her gods. The reply of Ruth is an apple of gold in a picture of silver: "Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried."

III. THIS BRINGS US TO LOVE SACRIFICING FOR LOVE. "How dear to the heart are the scenes of my childhood," and Ruth left them all for love. Every hill, valley, tree, flower and brook of Moab were doubtless dear to her heart. But she turns away from them all for love. For the last time she lays a wreath of flowers upon the grave of her dead and turns away from that for love. The religion of her people she leaves for love. She gives a fine illustration of Dr. Chalmers' sermon on "the expulsive power of a new affection." "They forsook all and followed him." Country, home, religion and the sacred associations of the dead, many a faithful Christian has left for the love of his Saviour.

IV. THERE IS LOVE SHARING WITH LOVE. Ruth gives up and takes up. She gives up all that Moab was to her and takes up all that loyal devotion to Naomi requires. "Where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried." Naomi was poor, and for love Ruth shared her poverty. Naomi was lonely, and for love she would share her loneliness. Naomi was just beginning a perilous journey from Moab to Jerusalem, but love cares not for danger. Naomi worshiped Jehovah the true God, and Ruth was glad to say, "Thy God shall be my God." In life and death fervent love delights to share whatever may come.

V. LOVE SERVING LOVE. Gleaning the wheat after the reapers was

the portion of a pauper, but Ruth willingly accepts the position that she may serve the object of her love. Gladstone reading and praying by the cot of the old street sweeper seems nobler than Gladstone ruling Great Britain. Queen Victoria ministering to the wants of the poor peasant woman in Scotland looks more royal than Victoria, Empress of India. Humble service is the token of true love. Jesus came "not to be ministered unto but to minister" because He loves us. And the reason for His girding Himself with the towel, and washing His disciples feet, is given in the words "he loved them unto the end." The most menial service is glorified by love. Murillo's master painting which represents a woman in the kitchen cooking dinner for her family, while the angels assist, makes the kitchen a vestibule of heaven. It is love of country that makes the patriot bear with cheerfulness the long march, the bloody conflict, and the lingering pain in the hospital. He who loves well alone can serve well.

VI. LOVE OBEYING LOVE. Naomi told Ruth what to do, and she did it without questioning. She acted contrary to the customs of Moab, where she had been trained, but she had such confidence in the loving wisdom of Naomi that she was willing even to act contrary to her own judgment. "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments." Obedience is love. The feeling which melts one with emotion, but does not prompt to obedience, is sometimes mistaken for love. It is only a counterfeit, and when we consider how much Jesus Christ loves us it ought to be easy for our love to obey His love. We obey authority because we must; we obey love because we delight to do so.

VII. THERE IS LOVE RECEIVING ALL THAT LOVE WILL BESTOW. Naomi warned Ruth on leaving Moab that she need not expect a husband in Bethlehem, and Ruth came not for the husband but for her love to Naomi. Through the loving ministry of her mother-in-law Ruth becomes the honored wife of Boaz, and the ancestress of our Lord Jesus Christ. The love that denied itself for Naomi is now willing to receive all that Naomi can give. And the God who asks of us self-denial, lovingly urges us to receive all the riches of grace and glory that he can bestow. The honor, the power, the happiness that come through our relation to Jesus Christ, our Father, delights to give us, and our love for Him makes us gratefully receive them from His hand. And if we shall prove as loyal to Christ as Ruth was to Naomi, the time is coming when we shall be exalted to a place on the throne with our royal husband. The hand that offers the cross delights to give the crown.