

Lesson 3: Radical Love

Ruth 1:14-18

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD." Song 8:6 (ESV)

Text: Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

But Ruth said:

Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following

After you;

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

Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.

When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Monday

On June 28, 1810, after completing his theological studies, The United State's and indeed North America's first foreign missionary, Adonirum Judson, presented himself to the Congregationalists churches to serve as their first missionary. He was intent on eventually reaching Burma. Burma at that time was a hostile and utterly unreached place. Its government was a terrible despotism. Fierce war was raging with Siam. Enemy raids were constant. There was often rebellion against the government with anarchy reigning in places; and there was absolutely no religious toleration. All previous missionaries that had tried to begin work in Burma had either been killed or left in despair. The very same day he presented himself, Adonirum met the beautiful Ann Hasseltine. One month later he declared his intention to become her suitor and marry her. Judson then wrote her father the following letter:

"I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your

What will a person do for the sake of love?

daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

What did Christ do for the love of His father's glory and the love of lost souls (Gal. 2:20b)?

Amazingly in that time, her father responded simply that, "She could make up her own mind in the matter." After hearing this, Ann wrote to her friend Lydia Kimball the following words, "I feel willing, and expect, if nothing in Providence prevents, to spend my days in this world in heathen lands. Yes, Lydia, I have about come to the determination to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God, in His providence, shall see fit to place me."

That story from the life of Ann Judson reminds me of the radical love and commitment of Ruth. As we come to Ruth chapter 1 verses 14-19 we come to verses that are almost breathtaking in their beauty. On a purely grammatical level, many commentators have admired and waxed eloquent about the rhythm and symmetry of her words in the original Hebrew language. They are a masterpiece in that language like we might say of one of Shakespeare's sonnets in our own tongue. The very central couplet of this poem being a mere four words ammek ammi, "Your people my people," welhayik elohay, "Your God, my God." One commentator writes, for instance, "Few utterances in the Bible match her speech for sheer ... beauty, and the extraordinary courage and spirituality that it expresses." But the poetic force of these words is only the beginning, Beloved.

To get the context sort of back in view. You will remember that in verses 1-5 we saw the tremendous grief of Naomi and her family. They left Bethlehem and their homeland in order to flee a famine. After arriving in Moab, Naomi's husband died. Her two sons married Moabite women. There were no children from either of the unions and

What do you think about Ruth's determination to stay with Naomi in light of Naomi's arguments?

then after about ten years both of her sons died, leaving her in a state of overwhelming grief and bitterness.

Naomi hears that there is now food in her home country so she resolves to go back home. Her two daughter's-in-law start out with her but before they get to far, Naomi turns and tells them that it's time to sever the relationship, the sense of obligation that they have toward her and go back to the homes of their families to start over, hopefully with new husbands and with the blessing of children if God gives them favor.

The girls at first refuse, but Naomi you will remember gives them three arguments for why they should turn back. Essentially she says: 1) It doesn't make any sense. You will have no prospects for the future if you stay with me; 2) Be realistic about your own desires. She knows that Orpah's and Ruth's true desire at that point in time is to remarry and that's an okay thing, but it's not going to happen if they stay tied to her; and 3) "The hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" She says, in effect, "God is working in my life not good but harm. And it grieves me for your sakes, but if you stay with me, all I have to offer you is sorrow and affliction."

So Naomi is striving with her daughters-in-law to get them to leave her. She is setting them free. Naomi undoubtedly recognized all of the problems and difficulties her daughters-in-law would face if they accompanied her all the way back to Bethlehem. Added to this were the rather dismal prospects of either of them ever finding other husbands there or living any kind of normal life other than one of great poverty, caring for a lonely and bitter old woman such as herself. She doesn't want that for them. She would spare them that grief, if she could.

Orpah is persuaded, kisses her mother-in-law and takes her leave. Ruth clings to her. She holds fast and I really think that she was actually physically holding fast to her. Naomi tries again. This time using the additional argument of peer pressure, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." And this is what gives birth to the statement that we have before us today.

What are we to learn from Ruth's declaration? What does God want us to see from Ruth's radical declaration, commitment, loyalty and love for her mother-in-law, her people and her God? Why is this text important for us today?

Jonathan Edwards answers the last question in his sermon on this text in

Who is Ruth an example of in her declaration to Naomi?

this way, “Because this history seems to be typical of the calling of the Gentile church, and indeed of the conversion of every believer. Ruth was not originally of Israel, but was a Moabitess, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel: but she forsook her own people, and the idols of the Gentiles, to worship the God of Israel, and to join herself to that people. Herein she seems to be a type of the Gentile church, and also of every sincere convert. Ruth forsook all her natural relations, and her own Country, the land of her nativity, and all her former possessions there, for the sake of the God of Israel; as every true Christian forsakes all for Christ.”

I think he’s right in that assessment. Every time I read this passage and meditate on it, my mind is immediately transported to Matthew 10 where the Lord says, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Orpah heeded the words of Naomi and sought to find her life in this world. Because of this, she turned her back on the one true God and returned to her own people and the idols of this world. Ruth, however, sought to lose her life for the sake of God and for the love of one of His own. “He who loses his life [or her life] for My sake will find it,” the Lord of glory says. And she becomes a testimony, a model and an example to all of us of the radical love that should reign in and and captivate each and every one of our own hearts. What are the elements of this radical love, this losing of your life for His sake? What does it look like? We will begin answering that question as we explore these verses in more depth tomorrow.

Tuesday

What are the elements of a radical love? The first one is this:

1. Radical love is ready to leave home and family (vv. 14-16).

Ruth says, “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge.” Now Ruth is not naive. She knows that she will never see her home or her family again.

Do not make the mistake of putting her commitment in the terms of our

own time of cell phones, e-mail and airplanes. Do not even make the mistake of putting it in the times of post offices and snail mail. For Ruth this means that her own mother, her own father, her own sisters and brothers, her own nieces and nephews, whoever she has, will be lost to her forever. All that is familiar, homes, friends, faces, smiles, the sound of this person's laughter, the sound of this other person's voice, all of these treasures will be lost forever and nothing but a fading memory. But Ruth has already counted the cost and she has already made her decision.

What would you do if God called you away from home for the sake of His kingdom? Could you face the unknown with the same courage as an Adoniram and Ann Judson, or a Ruth? Why or why not? What would your fears and issues be?

Or more commonplace, perhaps, but just as important, what if God called you to go home? Or what if God called you to make room in your home to care for and love an aging parent, to make the same commitment that Ruth makes to Naomi? Could you do this? Why is it so important? Consider 1 Tim. 5:8 in giving your answer.

What have you seen others ready to endure for the sake of love?

The next element that we see in the text is this:

2. Radical love is ready to endure painful hardship (e.g. widowhood & childlessness) (v. 16).

Radical love is ready to endure painful hardship, in Ruth's case widowhood and childlessness. Ruth understands Naomi's arguments and warnings perfectly well. She knows that Naomi has no man to give to her. As far as she knows, Naomi has no family connection left in the entire world. She doesn't know about a Boaz somewhere in her future and Naomi doesn't know about this possibility either.

What have you endured?

Ruth also knows that if she goes to Israel and by some fortune another man does find her and fall in love with her, there is still no way that she can marry, because to do so in that culture would have severed her commitment to Naomi. No, this is not a possibility in her mind at this point. To be with Naomi and to care for this elderly widow, to fulfill her commitment and satisfy this love, Ruth will have to endure her own brand of loneliness, living her life without husband, without child, without that kind of comfort, with which so many are blessed.

Can you think of other examples in Scripture, of those who readily faced down hardship for the sake of love?

One that comes to my mind is Anna. After losing her husband of seven years, she chose not to depart from the temple but to live as a widow for the next eighty four years serving God with fastings and prayers night and day, all this for the love of God and His promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Wednesday

3. Radical love is ready forsake all security (v. 15).

Ruth has no 401k. She has no skill set with which she can provide for her own and Naomi's needs. She cannot work at a trade or get a job waiting tables. Ruth doesn't even have a plan, let alone a back up plan. The only security she can see with earthly eyes is her own father, brother or other family member's household. All of which, she is about to leave behind forever.

Naomi has no way to provide for her own needs, either. She has no way to provide for the needs of Ruth. She has no resources, and she knows good and well that when she gets back home, she is going to be reduced to the status of a beggar, an elderly woman wholly dependent on the charity of others. No one wants to live like that, but this will be Naomi's lot and Ruth is destined to share it. Moreover, without a husband or a son or any prospect of obtaining one, future security is completely out of reach. Ruth will not only share in Naomi's insecurity, she will be destined to bear the brunt of it and to do so for much longer than Naomi.

But radical love, Beloved, overcomes fear.

How is it that Ruth can make this decision? How is it possible that she isn't beating a path back to Moab with Orpah as quickly as possible? (See 2 Cor. 5:7)

Hebrews 11:24-27 gives a stunning answer that was true of Ruth just as it was true of one who came before her, Moses. It says, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt ... by faith

he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

I am convinced that Ruth was ready to forsake all security because she had eyes of faith fixed on “Him who is invisible.” Boaz tells us plainly that this is the case in 2:12 where he speaks of her coming for refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel.

Not only does Radical love readily leave home and family, endure painful hardship and forsake all security for the one who is loved, we also see:

Has God ever called you to face the unknown? What happened?

4. Radical love courageously faces the unknown (v. 16).

“Wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge.”

To me, Beloved, this is the hardest thing of all. One can take a deep breath and bear up under hardship, if he can see where it is all going. Likewise, a person can forsake security for a time, if there are hopes, plans and reachable dreams on the horizon. But Ruth has none of these things.

Abraham out of faith and love for the Lord, who spoke to him, obeyed when he was called to go out of his home. He went without knowing where he was going, how long it would take to get there or what in the world was going to happen to him once he was there.

Neither does Ruth know what’s going to happen to her, an unknown land, new people, new faces, new customs, complete absorption into a new language far different from what she picked up in the home married Mahlon, but still surrounded by Moabites and their culture. Everything will be new and everything different. This is a difficult and fearful thing to face, the unknown. It’s difficult even moving from place to place in your own land and country, let alone across national and cultural boundaries. But still, this is no real obstacle for the love of Ruth. She is ready, even as Abraham was ready to go for the love and joy of God.

Thursday

We have alluded to the next element of radical love in a previous day when we compared Ruth to Moses. But now let’s state and examine it in light of the words of verse 16, namely:

What were the things that counted against faith for Ruth? What obstacles did she have to overcome in order to believe?

5. Radical love is bound up in a radical faith (v. 16).

In verse 16, Ruth says, “Your God, my God.” It’s such a simple statement, but it shows such a radical faith in light of her circumstances.

Consider this: Naomi has just said in verse 13, “The hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” Naomi's experience of God was bitterness. But in spite of this, Ruth readily forsakes her own religious heritage and makes the God of Israel her God. Perhaps she had made that commitment years before, when her husband told her of the great love of God for Israel, His power at the Red Sea and His glorious purpose of peace and righteousness in the promise of the Messiah. Ruth is certainly familiar with God. She refers to Him by His covenant name in verse 17. She utters an oath that was not uncommon to the Jews of her day. Somehow or other, most likely through the witness of her dead husband, Ruth had come to trust in Naomi's God.

But understand. She has not simply made a superficial profession for the sake of family peace and alliances. Ruth, in spite of her own bitter providence, in spite of the bitter experience of loss in her family life and in spite of Naomi’s own despairing faith and imperfect witness, in spite of now being on the verge of a lifetime of complete destitution, Ruth is more determined than ever to take refuge in and continue with the God of Israel.

That, Beloved, is radical faith.

How many in this world are Orpahs at heart? How many take hard circumstance, grief, pain, disappointment, the bitter testimony of others - especially those who are closest to them - how many take those things and readily use them as an excuse to turn their backs upon God and walk away? How rare and strange is a Ruth, a woman who will not be dissuaded though all the world and all her circumstances urge her to turn back?

Here we have a picture of God's ideal woman. Faith in God that sees beyond present bitter setbacks. Freedom from the securities and comforts of the world. Courage to venture into the unknown and the strange. Radical commitment in the relationships appointed by God. O, that the church might breed this kind of woman! O that my own daughter might become a Ruth, mighty in faith.

This kind of faith beloved is the root, and lifeblood of Ruth's love. The two go hand in hand. They are bound up together. Consider 1 Thess. 4:9 "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." And consider 1 John 4:19 "We love, because He first loved us." Faith brings us into fellowship with God, and God then gives birth to this kind of radical love in our hearts. He teaches us to love both Himself and others as 1 Thess. 4:9 tells us.

The love of Ruth for God and Naomi is not an earthly love. There is nothing in Ruth's world that can even come close to explaining what is happening here in these verses. This devotion does not come from her own resources, but the God of mercy and unimaginable grace has given birth to this in her heart. Left to herself, Ruth would be on the road with Orpah, traveling back to her parent's house in Moab and ready to wash her hands of the past. But instead, we see radical love born out of a frankly amazing faith given everything that Ruth has experienced. This is not Ruth. This is the Spirit of God filling her mouth and moving in her heart. Is it any wonder that Naomi is left speechless?

The next element of radical love that we see revealed in this text is:

What commitment would God have us make to our fellow believers?

6. Radical love clings tenaciously to the people of God (vv. 14, 16).

Ruth not only "clings" to Naomi in verse 14, she says, "Your people, my people."

God teaches us to love. He teaches us to love our parents (Ex. 20:12). He teaches us to love our spouses (Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:4). He teaches us to love our children (Ps. 127:3; Titus 2:4). He teaches us to love strangers and those in need, all our neighbors (Luke 10:27-37). He even teaches us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-47).

God teaches us to love Himself above all of these, so that our love for others is not dependent on them and their behavior, character and reactions but ultimately on our love for Him. He teaches us that our

love and loyalty to Him is to be so powerful that we can love and do good to the completely unlovable of this world; and that even our love for others, which he has commanded, would dim and be like hatred in comparison to this still greater love (Luke 14:26-27). He teaches us that our love for Him should encompass our whole being and all of our actions (Luke 10:27). And He teaches us that this love should burn hot for Him (Gal. 4:18-19). (“It’s flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord”).

It is certainly true that Naomi was going through a season of great bitterness and depression, but did this mitigate Ruth’s obligation to love her? Why not?

He teaches all of these things, Beloved, and one of the grand marks of a true son or daughter of God is that he or she loves the people of God. Twenty times in the New Testament alone we are exhorted to love one another. 1 John 3:10 says, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” 1 John 3:20-21, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” Galatians 6:10, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

In her radical love of Naomi, Ruth demonstrates this grand mark of a true daughter of God. Have you ever really considered the seriousness of this matter, loving one another in the household of faith, a son or daughter of God?

You know what is frightening? The simple fact that I am living with a daughter of the king of the universe, and He is very concerned with how I treat His dear daughter for whom he gave His life. It might just help us to hold our tongues, speak a little more carefully and deal with one another a little more circumspectly in love, if we take a moment to consider that we are dealing with sons and daughters of God, Himself.

Friday

We want to consider to final elements of radical love from our text today. The next that we see is this:

7. Radical love is stronger than death (v. 17).

As if verse 16 were not an amazing enough commitment, Ruth says a stunning thing in verse 17. She says, “Where you die, I will die, and

there will I be buried.”

Just meditate on this for a moment. Ruth is saying to Naomi, “I’m never going to return home. Even when you die, I will still be there, where your body lies to remember you, year after year after year. I’m committed to you not just for the rest of your life, Naomi. I’m committed to you for the rest of my life, even after you’re gone.”

I mean, perhaps one could argue that Ruth secretly consoling herself with the fact that Naomi is older and probably isn’t going to be around much longer anyway. And after she’s gone, she will be able to move back home or on to something else. But not Ruth, that is not what she has in mind at all.

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for mighty as death is love, stubborn as the grave is ardor; it’s flames are flames of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised,” (Song of songs 8:6-7 - Author’s Transaltion). Ruth understands this. Death does not end the love God teaches and neither would it end her love for and devotion to Naomi.

Finally we see in this text”

How does love find its strength in God?

8. Radical love finds its strength in God (v. 17).

Ruth takes an oath in verse 17. A more literal translation of the Hebrew here is this:

“Thus may Yahweh do to me and
thus may he add,
Surely nothing but death will
separate me and you.”

This a very common self-imprecatory oath. Variations of it appear in the Old Testament 12 times. “Thus may Yahweh do,” stood for any and all possible calamities that the Lord might choose to inflict on a person that did not keep his or her oath (sickness, famine, plague, sword, fire, death etc). It was usually accompanied by a non-verbal gesture, like passing a hand across your throat. The addition of “thus may he add” strengthened the force of the oath by asking the Lord to further punish the person even beyond the normal disasters, if the person reneges.”

Not all oaths are wrong. The oaths that the Lord condemns are the empty and contradictory attempts at deceit that were common among the Pharisees: “If I swear by the alter I don’t have to keep it, but if I swear by the gold on the altar then I have to keep it.” That kind of nonsensical wickedness which was prevalent at the time the Lord walked the earth is soundly condemned in Scripture.

But even the Lord Jesus acknowledged and allowed Himself to be placed under oath on one occasion and God takes many oaths upon Himself in Scripture. But, the point here is simply that Ruth finds strength to fulfill her word through her sincere and genuine faith in God. True agape love finds its strength in God alone, and that always brings Him glory. May we also be a people of radical love.

Hymn: Wherever He Leads I’ll Go

Take up thy cross and follow Me,” I heard my Master say;
“I gave My life to ransom the, Surrender your all today.
Wherever He leads I’ll go, Wherever He leads I’ll go,
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I’ll go.

He drew me closer to his side, I sought His will to know,
And in that will I now abide, Wherever he leads I’ll go.
Wherever He leads I’ll go, Wherever He leads I’ll go,
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I’ll go.

It may be thro’ the shadows dim, Or o’er the stormy sea,
I take the cross and follow Him, Wherever He leadeth me.
Wherever He leads I’ll go, Wherever He leads I’ll go,
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I’ll go.

My heart, my life, my all I bring to Christ who loves me so;
He is my Master, Lord, and King, Wherever He leads I’ll go.
Wherever He leads I’ll go, Wherever He leads I’ll go,
I’ll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I’ll go.

Words and Music, B.B. McKinney, 1936