

CHOOSING COMMUNITY WISELY Sunday School- August 14, 2011

Unifying Topic: CHOOSING A COMMUNITY

Lesson Text

I. Attempting To Secure A Better Life (Ruth 1:8-10)

II. The Dilemma Of The Widows (Ruth 1:11-14)

III. Ruth Shows Loyalty To Naomi (Ruth 1:15-18)

The Main Thought: And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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. (Ruth 1:16, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Everyone lives in more than one community. How do we choose or identify our communities? Ruth chose to make her community with Naomi as an expression of her faith in the God of Israel.

Lesson Aim: To examine the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman who, because of faith, chose to move into Naomi's community.

Life Aim: Given that relationship can be formed through multiple communities, this lesson will seek to encourage careful thought as to the kind of communities one chooses to affiliate with.

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- 1:8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.
- 1:9 The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.
- 1:10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.
- 1:11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?
- 1:12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;
- 1:13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.
- 1:14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.
- 1:15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.
- 1:16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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.
- 1:17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.
- 1:18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

HISTORY:

The setting of the first part of the Book of Ruth is Bethlehem-Judah. These two words, Bethlehem-Judah, with their meaning the "house of bread," later becomes the birthplace of Him Who is the "Bread of Heaven," Jesus Christ. Judah, the tribe of which our Savior was a descendant, means "Praise the Lord." However, at this time we find in this country of Bethlehem-Judah, where there was supposed to have been bread and worship, there was none, only famine. In the very place where you would look for plenty, there was want. It is the same with us in the spiritual life. If we do not have spiritual rain coming from the open heavens, it means a famine for our souls and spiritual death in the future. When God sends affliction, it is not for us to run away from, but to turn to God and humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways.

The story of **Ruth** is a series of setbacks. Naomi and her husband and two sons were forced to leave their homeland in Bethlehem-Judah on account of famine. Then Naomi's husband dies. Her sons marry Moabite women and for ten years the women prove to be barren. And then her sons die an early death, leaving two widows in the house of Naomi. After ten years of tragedy, Naomi decided to **return to her own country** where she had now heard that the Lord had visited His people.

LESSON:

Ruth 1:8-10 Attempting To Secure A Better Life

1:8 Now the scene centers on the tragic lives of three women (Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth). Have you ever had to transition somewhere else? Well, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go on home to their mother's house, so they would be able to marry again, not follow her into uncertainty. Orpah and Ruth showed tremendous respect in their duty as wives and great respect in the memory of their husband's death. "Deal kindly" is the ancient Hebrew word "hesed." "Hesed"

encompasses deeds of mercy performed by a more powerful party for the benefit of the weaker one." (Huey).¹ And Naomi was saying: **the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.** With these words Naomi freely blessed them. She prayed that they would remarry (each in the house of her husband).

1:9 tends to predict that they **find rest** in their new marriage the Lord will grant to them. In those times in the ancient world, widows were taken advantage of or ignored; poverty stricken, if the Law did not provide for them. However, the Law said that the nearest relative of the dead husband should care for the widow, but Naomi had no relatives in Moab, and she did not know if any of her relatives were alive in Israel. She hoped that they would find a better situation than she could provide for them; that the second marriage would be more blessed than the first; and that they would find rest after all their sorrow. This was a very emotional time for all three. As Naomi prayed, she blessed and kissed them, and they began to weep. **1:10** Orpah and Ruth truly wanted to stay with Naomi and return back with her to her country (Bethlehem), because there is nothing like being somewhere stable and secure with those you love. Naomi just wanted a better life for her daughters-in-law and so did they.

Ruth 1:11-14 The Dilemma Of The Widows

1:11 Naomi reminds them that there are **no more sons in her womb; that there are no more husbands** where she's going. Naomi's comment here refers to the "*Levirate Marriage*", where the obligation of a dead man's brother is to care for his widow (Deut.25:5-10). The Law kept the widow from poverty and it provided a way for the family name of the dead husband to continue.

1:12 She encouraged them to remain in their own homeland and remarry. Three times Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return (vv8, 11, 12). She lets them know that she is too old to be looking for a husband. She didn't even have hope of finding one or God sending her one. So if they were even looking in that direction or contemplating it, she makes it very clear by saying: **if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons.** This means they still would be too old to even wait till her sons become of age for them to marry if she became pregnant tonight.

1:13 She's still saying, why waste your years waiting for my sons to grow up? - Would you wait that long? This was unreasonable for them to do. **"For it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me."** ²She grieves much over the situation because she feels that she is responsible for the fate of the two girls. By this statement she acknowledges, "I am the sinner, but you are the sufferers. I have disobeyed God in bringing my sons to the land of Moab where they intermarried against His commandments. Because of this, the hand of the Lord is upon me; it grieves me for your sakes." This shows that no man liveth or dieth to himself. He either helps to take men to Heaven or helps to drag them down to hell. Your life either lifts your loved ones, neighbors, and friends, or causes them to drift farther from God. Naomi might have not been thinking straight because of her grief, but she did not encourage them to trust in the God she served.

1:14 They again wept and Orpah gave a parting kiss. Ruth and Orpah both felt the same feelings but Ruth did differently than Orpah. Orpah decides that she wants to go back to her country, her kindred, and her father's house, but Ruth sticks with Naomi. Why did Ruth cling? I think it took courage to go into the unfamiliar and go into uncertainty. Yes she could have gone back into the same-old-same-old. However, when you're tired of that, it only takes a word to be quickened in your spirit for change.

Ruth 1:15-18 Ruth Shows Loyalty To Naomi

1:15 Naomi uses Orpah's decision to prompt Ruth to make the same decision. This is the fourth time she says go **back** to your home; **your people**, and this time she says to **(her) gods**. How could Naomi encourage Ruth and Orpah to return to their false gods? This would surely condemn them eternally? Serving the gods of Moab (or any others) was an abomination to God. All I can say is that God knows what He's doing. He has given these women a choice. There was something special that turned this moment into a God-moment. I don't know what "*word*" was quickened in Ruth for her to cling to Naomi, but I do know God was speaking. I believe that she didn't want to go back to those false gods that she was used to. I believed she had heard about the true and living God from Naomi and wanted to experience life in His presence.

But when Naomi mentioned to Ruth that Orpah had returned to her pagan gods, that was the worst unkindness of all that she would go back to. Their ultimate blessing would have been to leave their land, their people, their false religion, and to identify with the Israelites and with their God. One of the hardest things in the world is to get a person to give up a false religion or a religion with no life or spirituality. So Orpah and Ruth were tested to see whether they were

¹ <http://www.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?book=ru&chapter=001>

² <http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>

ready to give up relatives and religion.

1:16 Ruth was a Moabitess, but that didn't stop her from worshipping the true God, nor did it stop God from accepting her worship and heaping great blessings upon her. Ruth is a perfect example of God's partiality. And this in itself is a confession of her faith in the God of Israel. There are six confessions in Ruth's decision:

(1)³ *"Whither thou goest, I will go"* and *"where thou lodgest, I will lodge."* – **Her submission.**

- a. Her surrender was so complete that she desired to walk in the footsteps of another. Likewise, Ruth left the land of the curse for the land of the covenant.
- b. She has completely renounced all freedom of choice and commits herself into the care and keeping of another. Likewise, the believer who yields completely to Christ may look to Him as the source of his supply.

(2) *"Thy people shall be my people."* and *"thy God shall be my God."* – **Her acceptance.**

- a. This meant a separation from all her old associates and an acceptance of a people whom she had never known. Ruth's definite decision proclaimed her severance from Moab and all its idolatrous worship.
- b. She makes this a personal matter and says, *"He shall be my God."* She wanted a personal God for propitiation, power, protection, and provision.

1:17 She was determined to abide with Naomi.

(3) *"Where thou diest, will I die."* and *"there will I be buried."* – **Her consecration.**

- a. Her consecration went as far as the last breath of her earthly career.
- b. Her love had reached its highest peak and its greatest abandonment. How unlike the natural man was she, who thinks of this life only, who lives as if it terminated in death, seldom thinking of the life beyond the grave. She did not want even her bones, the remains of her earthly career, to be buried in Moab. She desired her remains to lie on God's territory.

1:18 When Naomi saw that she was **"steadfastly minded to go with her,"** she was silent and was convinced that Ruth had made the choice, not because of human ties but on the grounds of faith that there was bread (CHRIST) in Bethlehem.

SUMMARY:

God has given people a choice to choose whatever they want. If you want a better life, God has given us the choice to choose a better life. We don't have to stay stuck. Life is in your hands to choose God! The women in this story is in a different place to meet Jesus. At least four times Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth to go back home to Moab, to your people, to your familiarity, to where you feel comfortable, even to your gods. Only one had ears to hear and make the right choice. To leave your home and go to another city or even another country would be a hard decision to make, unless there was a *"peace"* to come over you to assure you that this is a wise choice for you, you, wouldn't do it. They had been told several times to go back. Now if people tell you to go back, you might think they didn't want you or need you. The love was there but for Orpah to change and not go back to familiarity was not in the cards; not in her destiny!

Moving takes great faith, particularly if you don't have anything; and it takes even greater faith to move in a community of people of a different faith. It's good when you have another to cling to. Naomi is old and there was a love-tie between the two. That's what Ruth had. She clung to the physical being of Naomi but even greater to the God of Naomi and Israel! She looked pass the physical to the Supernatural supply—God the Greater One!—"Bethlehem", the house of bread! God had given her an outlet. It was the beginning of a new community and a new life. It would be challenging, but when Ruth abandoned all for God in speech and action, God turned His unveiling power to be without limits. Ruth had set her mind on going with Naomi, and nothing Naomi could say would discourage her. This is absolute dedication: *"Whither thou goest, I will go"* and *"where thou lodgest, I will lodge."* *"Thy people shall be my people."* and *"thy God shall be my God."* *Where thou diest, will I die."* and *"there will I be buried."* Her confession was the seal of it all! There was no doubt Ruth chose wisely her new community to dwell in.

APPLICATION:

⁴Can people look at your life, just as Ruth looked at Naomi's, and say *"I want your God to be my God!"*? Your trust in God, and turning towards Him in tough times, will often be the thing that draws others to the Lord.

³ <http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

⁴ <http://www.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?book=ru&chapter=001>

<http://www.pitwm.net//pitwm-sundayschool.html>