

Reading: Ruth 1:14-22

THE ROMANCE OF REDEMPTION

3. THE STORY OF THREE WIDOWS

On November 16, 1811 an unusual thing happened to the Mississippi River. The name “ *Mississippi*,” comes from an Indian word that means “ *big river*.” The river flows some 2348 miles from its source in north-western Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. What happened in 1811 was unprecedented for the river. An earthquake hit the state of Missouri and had a strange effect on the river. *For a short period of time the river’s direction was interrupted and it flowed backward.* There have been many that have found themselves going backward in their Christian lives. We find several in the Bible. People like Demas (2 Tim 4:10) Peter (Mk 14:71) and the classic example of Jonah. (Jonah 1:2) Instead of a cleaving to the Lord there is often a leaving of the Lord. Robert Robinson described it well when he said,

***“ Prone to wander, Lord I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love.”***

Naomi could have uttered those words. Naomi had been away from home and away from God. Now we find her coming home and back to God. You can almost hear Naomi saying, “ *I’ve wasted many precious years. Now I’m coming home. I now repent with bitter tears, Lord I’m coming home.*” A certain business man was asked how he had become so successful. He replied, “ *Good decisions.*” The questioner persisted, “ *But how do you learn to make good decisions ?*” The old fellow answered, “ *Experience.*” One more question then followed, “ *Well, how do you get the experience ?*” He answered, “ *Bad decisions.*” My Naomi had made a bad decision when she left Bethlehem with Elimelech and her two sons. But now we see her making a good decision as she returns to the Lord.

What a picture we have here of three defenceless women setting on this journey to Bethlehem during lawless times. In (1:7) we are told that they set out, but (1:19) tells us that all of them did not get there. Here they are standing at the cross roads where each had to make a definite decision whether to go back to the old life with its pagan idols or press on with Naomi to a strange but promising land. Now in these three widows we have three types of people. Some are backsliders who are truly restored to the Lord, others are unbelievers perhaps moved by the gospel but

not enough to take the decisive step. Ruth of course is a picture of a true believer who turns in faith to the Lord. (2:12) Now lets have a look at these three widows this !

(1) A LEAVING WIDOW

For Orpah went back. (1:15) Some give the meaning of her name as “ *stubborn,*” or “ *back of the neck.*” She certainly turned that to the Lord, for she turned away to go to her own land and gods as Naomi urged her to do.

Orpah kissed her mother in law. The Jews observe three kinds of kisses. There is the kiss of reverence to honour a person of dignity (1 Sam 10:1) there is the kiss of friendship (Exod 4:27) and there is the kiss of parting.

(1:14) (1) Now if you look at the context closely you’ll notice Orpah’s decision reflects,

(a) HER SHALLOWNESS:

For she was a lady with no depth. In (1:9) we are told that she wept, in (1:14) she weeps again but her tears were not a sign of repentance. For outward show is no indication of inward grace. Sure she kissed Naomi because she loved her, but she not love Naomi’s God, so as to forsake her sin. She preferred Chemosh the god of the Moabites to Jehovah the true and living God.

(Num 21:29 1Kings 11:7) My is this type of character not seen on every hand in Christian circles today ? *No depth, no stability, no root.* (Matt 13:21)

Their faith is nothing but cosmetic. They are not very interested in the Word of God. They think, speak, reason and act like the ungodly world. They do not reflect Christian principles in their lifestyle. They blow hot and cold but more cold than hot. They kiss Christ verbally but kick Him with their actions. They glow with enthusiasm, but the glow is only skin deep. Their real love is for Moab, the world and the ungodly. Do you recall on one occasion the defection of some of Christ’s disciples ? We are told in John’s gospel “ *from that time many went back and walked no more with Him.*”

(6:67) Do you see that phrase “ *went back,*” ? It signifies “ *retreat, desertion, forsaking a position once occupied.*” (Jn 18:6) Here were people who walked no longer in the Saviour’s company. “ *Many went back.*” Are you going back or going forward ? If you are tempted to go back let me ask you a question, “ *to whom shall you go ?*” Will you try Eastern Mysticism or Buddhism ? Will you embrace the teachings of Islam ? To whom shall you go for pardon, for peace, for power ?

“To whom shall you go ?” At this time of world turmoil.

“To whom shall you go ?” In the loneliness of old age ?

“To whom shall you go ?” In the hour of death ?

“To whom shall you go ?” In the day of judgment ?

My Can you better yourself by turning your back on the Lord and going back to the Moab of this world ? Demas must have thought so. For when Paul wrote about this man in the Colossian letter and also in his letter to Philemon (4:14) Demas seemed to be going forward but do you recall what he say to Timothy at the end of his life ? “ *Demas hath forsaken me having loved this present world.*” (4:10) No perseverance ! What a beacon light for us, telling us as the Book of Hebrews does, don't go back, keep going forward. Someone has said, “ *Continuance is the test of reality.*” My having commenced are you continuing ?
(a)

(b) HER SELFISHNESS:

You see, the same cause that induced Orpah to go back induced Ruth to go forward, namely that Naomi had no more sons. Orpah went along the road as far as things tied in with her interests, but when the prospect of a husband in Israel was for ever put aside (1:12-13) she was unable to deny her self, her interests, her future, unwilling to forsake all for God. I wonder are we willing to part with much but not with all ? To go so far along the road with the Saviour as long as it calls for no self denial, no self renunciation, no self sacrifice. The Lord Jesus said on one occasion, “ *whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be my disciple.*” (Lk 14:33) To be his disciple must I forsake all that I have ? Yes ! It simply means that if I am going to be his disciple I must abandon all claim to all that I have.

It means hands of my life, my home, my family, my possessions for all that I have up to now looked on as mine I will from now on look on as His. Have you got to that place yet ? Have you abandoned all claim to all that you have ? Have you come to recognise the sovereign rights of the Lord Jesus with respect to all that you have ? This Orpah was not willing to do. She goes back to idolatry. And when she goes back, she walks off the pages of Scripture into silence and into oblivion. We never hear of her again. But Ruth made a decision for God, and when she made this decision, it was for time and eternity. And you'll find her mentioned in the very first chapter of Matthew. She's in the genealogy that led to Christ. So have a look at Ruth,

(2) A CLEAVING WIDOW

Do you see the contrast in (1:14) ? “ *Orpah kissed her mother in law but Ruth clave unto her.*” The Hebrew word “ *clave,*” is a strong word. It is the same word that is translated “ *followeth hard,*” in (Ps 63:8) “ *stuck,*” in (Ps 119:31) and “ *sticketh closer,*” in (Prov 18:24) All these words show the nature of the cleaving. It is tenacious, faithful, and persistent regardless of circumstances. It is the kind of relationship God wants husbands and wives to have, for it is the same word translated “ *cleave,*” in (Gen 2:24) which speaks of marriage. “ *Therefore shall man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife.*” Unfortunately, our day is marked by broken vows in marriage. “ *But Ruth clave unto her.*” Indeed we see from Ruth’s amazing confession of faith that she was not prepared to be separated from Naomi. Orpah, with whom she had started on the way to Bethlehem is now gone. Moab, once the centre of all her interests is behind her. Before her lies the hills of Israel, with its alien faces and unknown trials. My what is it that moves Ruth to journey in the direction of another land ? What calls her ? It is a voice we cannot hear, the call of grace to a path of faith, hope and love ! Ruth had fallen in love with Naomi’s Lord, the God of Israel under whose wings she had come to trust. (2:12) *The words by which she is remembered most are her open confession of faith, concerning her conversion to God, a happening which had transpired some time previously in the land of Moab.* Now this is a key point in the story. My if Ruth had not declared her faith that would have been the end of the story. If Ruth had turned around and gone back to Moab, and if Naomi had gone to Bethlehem alone, the book of Ruth would never have been written.

Do you know whose name appears at the end of this book ? (4:22) David, and it was through the family of David that the Lord Jesus came. My do you see how critical Ruth’s decision was ? All of our decisions are important but some have greater consequences than others, and Ruth made the most important decision of life when she came “ *to trust under His wings.*” (2:12)

Now Ruth’s statement here is one of the literary gems of all time. It has been set to music, and often sung at weddings to show the couples commitment to each other in marriage. What we need today are people who make real decisions for God. The decision of Ruth was that kind of decision. Notice that Ruth was determined to,

(a) ENJOY NAOMI’S PRESENCE:

“ *Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee,*” (1:16) Ruth is refusing to leave Naomi now or anytime. (1:17) That’s faithfulness and commitment. We often hear jokes about mother’s in law and their daughters in law,

but this daughter dearly loved her mother in law. *Commitment.* Is this not the kind of commitment that ought to characterise *marriage* ? To many today get married for better or for worse but not for long. The sign that hung in the Hollywood jewellery store for several months did not even make front page news in the Los Angeles Times. It read “ *We rent wedding rings.*” This temporary commitment to marriage is now being embraced by Christians. By Christians ! Yes ! My we have the power and presence of the living Lord available to us, the prayer support of others in the family of God, the inner working of the Holy Spirit, the divinely inspired handbook of instruction on marriage and the home. Our cup is full and overflowing yet in spite of all these resources Christian husbands and wives are walking away.

Do you know what marriage is ? *Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing with another person until death. “ Entreat me not to leave thee.”* *Commitment.* Is this not the kind of commitment that ought to mark our *service* ? Do you recall what was said of Christ ? He “ *became obedient unto death even the death of the cross,*” (Phil 2:8) Do you remember what Paul said about Timothy ? “ *I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.*”

(Phil 2:21) Some teach a Sunday School, teach the youth, visit the sick, evangelise the lost, until they encounter a problem, then they quit. A pastor takes on a church until problems arise then he resigns.

Commitment ! When I arrived at the Iron Hall in 1987 I was not long there until I met a man called Jack

McKibben. Jack was saved in the hall when he was a teenager and he made a commitment *then to serve the Lord in the local church.*

He was neither elder, deacon, or caretaker but he meant more to me than all three rolled up together. If the service started at 8.00pm Jack was there at 6.45 pm. He opened up, saw that everything was alright. When I arrived he was by my side, to see if there was anything I needed done. He was the Pastors sidekick. Jack never left the building until I left. If some soul wanted to speak to me, he was outside my room. *He was not an office bearer but he would not leave me with a lady on my own.* It would never cross his mind to leave Iron Hall and go somewhere else on the Lord’s day. He was always there until the day he died ! *Commitment !* (a)

(b) TO FOLLOW NAOMI’S FOOTSTEPS:

“ *For whether thou goest I will go and where,*”

(1:16) To go where Naomi goes, to stay where Naomi stays. From now on her

path will be determined by Naomi's path. Ittai, one of David's men, has his pathway determined by David. His words bear a striking resemblance to those of Ruth. " *As the Lord liveth, surely in what place my Lord will be whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.*"

(2 Sam 15:21) It is so with the Christian. We have chosen the Saviour and our path must be determined by His. How wonderful to know that He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. (Jn 10:4) My are you determined to follow His leading ? Whenever that leading comes and wherever that leading brings ?

(c) TO LOVE NAOMI'S PEOPLE:

" *Thy people shall be my people,*" (1:16) This meant a new association. What a difficult choice to leave her father's house, her kindred and her land. Do you recall how endearing were the words of Boaz to her ?

(2:11-12) Is this not the experience of all who come to faith in the Lord ? We enter into fellowship with those of like precious faith. Now this association with the Lord's people calls for love and forbearance (Col 3:13) for the saints can be terribly trying oft times without half trying. Moses *decided " to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."* (Heb 11:25) But the record shows that he got most of it from the people of God. Yet the Lord in His wisdom and love brings us into fellowship with each other that we may learn to consider one another and exercise patience, gentleness and love. (1 Jn 4:7) So here is Ruth determined to (a) (b) (c) and above all,

(d) TO KNOW NAOMI'S GOD:

" *And thy God my God,*" (1:16) My was this not the hardest statement of all ? Ruth was turning her back on all that she had been taught since childhood. Now of all the ties that are difficult to break, man made religion is the most difficult. But Jehovah will not share with the gods of Moab, Christ will not be synthesized with others. The break with the past must be clean and complete. Ruth dethrones Chemosh (Num 21:29) forever and exalts the Lord (Elohim) as her future guide and shield. Now as I have intimated already, in this Book of Ruth God is made known through His various names. *There are many names for God, for no one name could express all that He is, in Himself, and in His grace towards men.* Now the name used by Ruth here is **Elohim**. This name is used in the opening verse of the Word of God, " *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" (Gen 1:1) This name for God

Elohim appears 2,550 times in the Old Testament. The meaning is simply God as it is always rendered in the Authorized Version. The meaning of this name is clearly

defined in its first mention. God is Supreme, Eternal, the Great Creator of all things. Dr. Campbell Morgan describes *Elohim as the One to whom all power belongs, absolute, unqualified, unlimited energy. Elohim is also a plural noun, suggesting the truth of the Holy Trinity, which was fully revealed in the person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.* My this One was the One chosen to be the God of Ruth. What amazing grace, that had taught Ruth the stranger, brought up to worship the god of stone, Chemosh, to lift up her voice and heart to own allegiance to Elohim, her Creator and Saviour. “ *Thy God my God.*” My is this God your God ? How well do you know Him ? Do you know Him as Elohim ? The One with whom no problem is too difficult to solve, no person too hard to save, no promise too difficult to fulfil, no prayer no hard to answer. (d)

(e) TO MAINTAIN NAOMI'S FAITH:

“ *Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried,*” What she was simply was this, “ *If you die I've no intention of returning to Moab and idolatry.*” She was making a decision that would never be reversed or altered. She would follow to the end. Where did Christ die ? At Calvary, upon the cross. There the believer dies also. Do you recall Paul's words ? “ *I am crucified with Christ.*” (Gal 2:20) Do you accept that fact ? Do you know its effect in your life ?

“ *Oh, may I count myself to be
Dead to the sins that wounded Thee
Dead to the pleasures of this earth
Unworthy of my heavenly birth.*”

“ *There will I be buried.*” Friends desire to be buried with those whom they love. Do you recall that Barzillai expressed this desire to David ? “ *Let thy servant be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother.*”

(2 Sam 19:37) To be buried with Christ is to realise that the last link with the old life is gone. Death dissolves the link. Burial hides the dead from sight. Believer's baptism rightly understood is the symbol of this union.

“ *There will I be buried.*” Where was He buried ? In the garden tomb.

“ *Back to the cross I look and wondering see
The Christ of God in agony for me
But gazing on that form divine
I see with Him myself His death is mine*

Again beside the garden tomb I stand

***And watch Him buried there with reverent band
But in that grave faith sees not one, but two
God hid me there forever from His view.”***

My Ruth had made her choice. Nothing more could be said. She had entirely surrendered herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God. (2) When Barnabas and saw the grace of God in the lives of the new converts, “ *he exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*” (Acts 11:23) Is that what you are doing ? (1) (2)

(3) A GRIEVING WIDOW

Do you see what she says in (1:13) Now look at (1:20) Naomi means “ *my pleasant one,*” Mara means “ *bitter.* You see, the

(a) DISPOSITION SHE POSSESSED WAS BITTER:

She had gone to Moab with a husband and two sons and now she had come home a childless widow. Do you see what she says ? “ *The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.*” (1:21) Are you bitter at life and at God ? You may be saying, “ *The Lord has been cruel to me.*” But this is impossible for whatever God does He does in love even though we may not see that way. “ *But I don't understand what God is doing,*” you may argue. My the Lord did not promise that we would always understand, but He is still in control and knows what is best for us. Bitterness is foolish for it only makes the situation worse. At the beginning of (Ch 1) Naomi made a wrong decision, in the middle of the chapter she gave wrong advice (1:8) by the end of the chapter she has a wrong disposition. A backslidden woman who was bitter against God. Oh, the curse of bitterness. Do you know what bitterness does ? *It dishonours the Son of God, it displeases the Spirit of God (Eph 4:30-31) and it divides the People of God ?* I have made people who have carried the poison of bitterness in their hearts for years. They were bitter against God because of something that happened, they were bitter against their pastor because of something he did or didn't do, they were bitter against their family because they had been left out in the will, they were bitter against their church because they were not made of enough. Bitterness ! Have you see in the lives of the saints ? Does it mark your life ? My stop nourishing your grudges and start imitating your God ! (Eph 4:26-32) (a) But, the

(b) DISCIPLINE SHE EXPERIENCED WAS BENEFICIAL:

Do you see what she says ? (1:21)

1. “ I went out full,” that’s Human Responsibility:

She was not forced to go out, she went out of her own volition. Full of family happiness, full of joy in her sons, full of hope for the future. “ *I went out full.*” Incidentally, that’s the privilege of every believer. Paul writing to the Corinthian Christians, “ *ye are full.*”

(1 Cor 4:8) As,

Barnabas we should be full of the Holy Spirit

(Acts 11:24) As Stephen we should be full of faith.

(Acts 6:5) As Dorcas we should be full of good works

(Acts 9:36) As the Apostles we should be full of joy.

(Acts 2:13) As the Roman Christians we should be full of goodness (Rom 15:14)

As Strangers and Pilgrims we should be full of glory (1 Pet 1:8) As those seven serving men we should be full of wisdom (Acts 6:3)

“ *I went out full,*” but forgetful of the Lord. Now Naomi returns “ *empty,*” but mindful of the Lord. 1.

2. “ The Lord empty,” that’s Divine Sovereignty:

You see, God in His love chastens us. “ *Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.*” (Heb 12:6) Chastening means

“ *child training.*” God wants to build us up, help us to develop and train us. Like Orpah we can treat this discipline and lose God’s blessing. Like Naomi we can rebel against God’s discipline, or like Ruth we can submit to God’s discipline believing that God has a purpose in it all. “ *I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*” Henry Moorehouse tells how he used to go and preach at a place in Lancashire. There he made two good friends, whom he used to call with. On one occasion wrote to his friend to collect him at the station. When he arrived his friend was not there.

The preacher called with him and immediately knew that something was wrong. His friend had backslidden and all he cared for was money. His wife and daughter had backslidden with him. Henry Moorehouse wondered how his son John was. So he headed down to the harbour to see him. John was doing well spiritually, but he was concerned about his family. He said, “ *Mr. Moorehouse I would lay down my life to see my family brought back again to the feet of the Saviour.*” On the following Sunday this young man stood up in the meeting and gave his testimony. He said exactly the same thing, “ *I would lay down my life to see my family*

brought back again to the feet of the Saviour.” The next morning he kissed his wife and little boy goodbye and headed out to sea on his fathers boat. He was working in the boat, when it gave a lurch and he was thrown into the water and drowned. After some time the father said to his other son, “ *Richard, run down and see if there is any news of the boat.*” An hour later the little boy came back with tears rolling down his cheeks. “ *What’s the matter ? Have they lost the nets in the fog ?*” The little boy responded, “ *No, its far worse than that, they’ve lost John.*”

The father broke down. A little later he said to his wife,
“ *Its time we got right with God. We have been heaping up money for John, and the Lord has taken him, lets ask the Lord to forgive us.*” Do you man something ? That man went out to preach the gospel again, but oh, at what a cost.

The last phrase of the chapter indicates to us that the Lord was preparing everything for them. (1:22) Had Naomi and Ruth come before harvest they would been in difficulty for means to support themselves. Had Ruth come after harvest she would have missed the opportunity of meeting Boaz. *You see, she was in the right place at the right time for all the blessings that were to follow. God in his providence was working for her.*

My God in His providence is working in your life today whether you realise it or not. God has prepared blessings for you today if you will only trust Him. What is your testimony today ? Are you bitter ? Are you angry at God ? Are you blaming others ? Are like Ruth are you quietly trusting the Lord ?