

MOTHER'S DAY 2013

Naomi

Ruth 1:1-18

INTRO: Today we remember mothers. I think it is in order to have "Mother's Day." And we are going to remember mothers by giving some thoughts to Naomi, the mother-in-law of the Ruth of the book of Ruth in the OT. No one knows exactly when the events of the book of Ruth took place. It was during the time of the Judges. You will remember that Joseph became the president of Egypt after having been sold into slavery by his brothers. Then, in a time of famine, he brought his family into Egypt. Here the Jewish people expanded and eventually came into bondage and were not allowed to leave Egypt. You will remember the 10 plagues and how Israel finally came out and Moses led them through the wilderness. Then, just before they entered the promised land Moses died and Joshua became the leader. He then led Israel into the land and when he died, the time of the Judges began.

This brings us to about 1400 BC. Saul became the first king of Israel about 1050 BC. So the time of the judges was about 350 years. That is about 100 years more than Canada is old. The time of the judges is certainly an interesting time. Of that time, Merrill C. Tenney, in his Bible Dictionary says, "The times were most distressing. The period was cruel, barbarous and bloody. The tribes scattered in the hill country of Canaan were divided into many separate enclaves." Ryrie's footnote says, "The beautiful romance of Ruth is set against the dark background of the apostasy and foreign oppression of the period of the judges." Twice in the book of Judges it says, "In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (17:6; 21:25). It is this kind of setting in which the book of Ruth takes place.

The book of Ruth has some wonderful teachings in it that relate to our day. In the book, Boaz, the kinsman Redeemer becomes a picture of Christ and Ruth becomes a picture of the Church. But this is mother's day and we want to consider, not Ruth, but Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law. Here is a mother who is a godly example. I tend to agree with what Walter Derksen told us at the Sweet Hearts Supper, that this book might well be called, *Naomi* instead of *Ruth*.

I. NAOMI'S PREDICAMENT IN LIFE

In Ruth 1:1-5 we are given Naomi's predicament in life before the main part of the story begins to develop. May I say to you as mother's, the main part of your story may not yet have begun to develop. May I encourage you to one thing this morning? No matter what lies ahead and no matter what is in your past, determine to live every moment of the present for the Lord. Solomon, after considering everything wisdom would afford him concluded like this, "Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: 'Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.'" When you do that in the present, there is no telling what the future will bring.

So, look at Naomi's first predicament described in verse 1, "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land." At prayer meeting in the past months we went through the prayers of the book of Judges. We saw Israel, how, when they lived right God blessed them. Then when things were good, they backslid, and then God punished them. Then when they became broken over their sin and cried out to God once more, then God blessed them again. Seven times in the book of Judges we saw this time of blessing, backsliding, and then brokenness.

I suppose that this famine may have been due to Israel's spiritual backsliding and God sent them a famine. Now motherhood takes place during all kinds of circumstances as well. There are times when things are difficult. Maybe things are difficult for your husband, and then they are difficult for you, as mother as well.

So verse 1 continues, "And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons." Well, we are talking about Naomi, the mother this morning. You see, Naomi had a husband, a living husband. May I ask you, every mother this morning, do you have a living husband? Well, nudge him and see if you get some movement going. If he moved when you nudged him, may I suggest to you that you have something to be thankful for. May I ask you if you thank God for your husband? We have mothers with us or those listening on line who may not have her husband with her any more. These mothers will tell

you that you ought not to take your husband for granted and you ought to thank God for him every day.

But there may be some mother who says, "You don't know my husband. I got a real bad deal." Well, I suspect then maybe he did too. May I ask you a question this morning, what kind of wife are you? I heard of a wife who spoke with her marriage counselor and she told him she got the wrong husband. Her husband was no good. And the counselor said, "Did you marry him?" And she said, "Well, yes." And then he said, "Then you got the right one." May I recommend this morning if you feel you got the wrong husband, stop trying to change him and you go get yourself changed. If you think you have the wrong husband, there is very little doubt you are a big part of the problem.

Well, I do admit, husbands can be a problem. This guy in our text probably was. He had been trying to eek out a living and it was just not panning out. He was likely a wheat farmer. And it was dry and it was dry, and then it was dry again, and he got discouraged. And one day he came home and he said, "Naomi dear, we will have to move. I can't make it here any longer."

Now, if I get the picture of this woman Naomi right, she did not say, "Move? Are you out of your mind my man? I am not moving. This is my home. My parents are here. My children's friends are here." I don't think she responded like that, though she lived in a difficult culture. I think she said, "Elimelech, I know how you have tried and if you think we must move, we must move. Where are you thinking of moving?"

And Elimelech said something like this, "Well, I was thinking of Moab." If I get the picture of this woman Naomi right, she did not say, "Moab. Do you know what kind of problems our people have had with the Moabites! You are inviting trouble, I tell you this cannot be from the Lord." No, I don't think she said that. I think she said, "Well, how do you think we can survive among the Moabites. Do you think it will work for us?" May I remind mothers this morning, that husbands sometimes do have strange ideas. You can fight that and try to change things so you get your way, but it is not your place to do that. The Bible is quite clear about that.

Well, they packed up and moved. But before we move with them let me tell you a bit about their names and where they lived and the place they moved to. Look at verse 2 (read). The name, *Elimelech* means *My God is King*. The name, *Naomi* means *pleasant*, or *sweet* or *lovely*. But they had two sons, and their names were Mahlon and Chilion. Mahlon means something like weakly or sickly. Chilion means pining. Ryrie says their names are something like *Puny* and *Pining*.

We must stop here a moment. Here was a family that had children who had health issues. We have such mothers here and there may be those listening to this message who have such children. Do you know what is added to a mother's load when her children are weakly or sickly? Is it not so easy to take healthy children for granted. This is mother's day but may I remind mothers and fathers to not forget to be mindful to thank God for healthy children?

Mothers, those of you with little children who are such busy little beavers that they wear you right out, the next time you are wore out from their busy-ness and you are tired and frustrated, how about sitting down and thanking God that your children are capable to do that? You could thank God your children have two eyes, or two ears or fingers or toes and more. "Thank You Lord my children are healthy."

But there is something strangely moving about a child that is not healthy. We have a grand-daughter whose eyes are not normal. It does something special in my heart. I don't know what it is but it is special. We have a young lady in this church whose parents have to carry her around and drive her in a wheel chair and they have told me that she does something special for their heart. It is amazing what children who are not healthy can do for a person, especially if you love the Lord.

Now look at verse 2, and the place they lived. They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem. Let me read a familiar verse for you, Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from

of old, From everlasting." The place our Lord was born is where they lived. The name Bethlehem means *house of bread*. Little did Naomi know at this time what would befall her in this place and what would happen many generations from then because of her life.

May I ask you, mother, what are your circumstances today. What may weigh on you because of what your husband has decided you must do as a family, or because you have children who are not well? May I encourage you to keep on going? If you give up or get discouraged and you let things go you will never know what could have been. And if you are faithful and you live right and you do not get weary and tired and give up, you may not learn in this life-time what your life has done, but you will learn in the next.

Then notice in verse two the last part that they went to Moab. You will remember that Lot's story in the OT has some sordid events. He had a child by his oldest daughter and this child's name was Moab and from him came the Moabites. There was considerable trouble between the Moabites and Israel but it seems at times there was travel between them and it was safe to go there.

If you travel Israel, there is a rift that runs from Lebanon in the north to Eilat, at the tip of the Red Sea. The Jordan River begins in the north of this rift and flows down into the Sea of Galilee, which is some 600 feet below sea level and from there it continues down in this rift to the Dead Sea, which is some 1300 feet below sea level. From there this rift goes upward above sea level and ends at Eilat which is at the tip of the Red Sea. The country of Moab lay on the other side of the Dead Sea and I expect that Naomi's family moved into the valley area just across the Dead Sea.

So we go on to verse 3, "Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband died." Are you a mother and you are a widow? May I remind you of something this morning that you need to remember? God has a special place in His heart for widows. May I remind the rest of us that we too should have a special place for widows. God cares about how we care for them.

Think now of Naomi. She is far away from home and family. Her children suffer with health matters and her husband is dead. Now she is left to make those decisions her husband has made up until now. And now Naomi has the task of rearing her two sons by herself. But we have to read between the verses here. She did take care of her two sons and they eventually grew up and both married. So verse 4 says, "Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth."

You see, sometimes a mother becomes a widow and she has to make all the decisions and she has to look after her children's weddings and so on. Every mother this morning whose husband is with her ought to thank God for him. Life changes so drastically when he is gone.

The last part of verse 4 says that they lived in Moab about 10 years. We do not know how old Mahlon and Chilion were when they moved there but I expect they are somewhere in their teens when they married. I expect that these marriages may have been difficult for Naomi. The Moabites were related to the Jewish people but they also worshipped other gods and I am sure they had different cultures. But, on the other hand, her sons were married and that must have been some consolation to her.

But life had yet to deal her a few more blows. Motherhood is a challenge in many ways, and many a mother has borne much grief. Verse 5 now tells us that both her sons died. I expect that it was shortly after they married that they also died. Maybe there was some epidemic. We are not told. What we do know is that they both died and we are not told of any grandchildren from Naomi's sons.

How much can mothers bear? May I ask you why life is like this? You may wish to listen to a mother's day message I did some years ago on the verse that says a mother will be saved by childbearing. I believe that God uses motherhood to conform women to the image of Christ. Sure He uses other things as well, but motherhood is one of those big things He uses. Job 5:7 says man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. You can't keep the sparks down and you can't keep man

away from trouble. And this is one of the greatest things God uses to accomplish good things in our lives.

So, picture Naomi there in Moab. She had already buried her husband. Now she will bury first one son and then the other. By now, no doubt, Naomi feels that somehow the Lord has dealt her some hard blows. She later decided to move back to her homeland. And when she came to Bethlehem the town was very excited and they said, "Is this Naomi? Is this Sweet; is this pleasant?" And she said, "Don't call me Sweet, call me Mara, bitter. She did not say they were to call her that because she was bitter, but because the Lord had dealt bitterly with her (1:19-20).

May I ask, am I speaking to some mother this morning, and she says, "The Lord has dealt bitterly with me?" How do you respond to that? Let me encourage once more, never give up. You never know what God will yet do.

II. NAOMI'S CHARACTER

Well, that gives us Naomi's predicament in life, but let us look at her character in the midst of life's circumstances. We begin with verse 6 (read). News has come from Bethlehem. Maybe it is one of those times when Israel became broken over their sin and God was once more blessing the nation. And now Naomi has heard that things have changed for the better and she wants to go home. Remember, she does not now have a husband to decide things for her or with her. She is alone to make such decisions.

Now from verse 7, it appears that Naomi's daughters-in-law decided to move to Israel, leaving their families and their homeland behind (read). And it appears they are some distance on the way, when Naomi re-thinks what it will be like for her daughters-in-law to leave their native home behind. Whom will they marry? What will it be like in a strange land for them?

Now it seems evident that these two daughters-in-law have voted to move with her. They certainly would not have been obligated to go with her. And as they are on

the way, Naomi has misgivings about taking them along. What she does then is very unselfish and begins to reveal some of her character. So look at verses 8-9 (read). No doubt these young ladies would have been a great solace to Naomi by staying with her, but thinking it all over, and while it was not too late to turn back yet, she encouraged them to return to their mothers.

Well, she kissed them good-bye and these young ladies both began to cry. And they said, "Surely we will return with you." In other words they are saying they are not going back. Now think what kind of mother-in-law Naomi must have been to them. From that, think of what kind of mother she must have been. Her daughters-in-law make no fuss about leaving their parents and home country, but they cry when Naomi suggests they stay at home while she leaves for Bethlehem.

Naomi further reveals her unselfishness when she says they are to return and each find a husband among their own people. She is concerned what it will be like for Moabitish women among her own people. So look at verses 11-13 (read). If she could bear sons in time they might marry them, she would gladly do that, but other than that their best chance for a husband would be in Moab among their own people.

And Naomi says, "It grieves me for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" She is in no way able to provide husbands for them. She does not seem to consider the idea that they might marry in Israel.

Now the names, Orpah and Ruth are Moabitish names. Keit and Delitzsch say that it has been suggested that Orpah means 'Departing' and Ruth, 'Friend'. However, they say it cannot be conclusively shown. But however that may be, look at verse 14 (read). So Orpah went back home, but Ruth was adamant. She clung to Naomi.

Now all of this is very revealing as to the character of Naomi. And though she feels God has dealt hardly with her, yet she acknowledges Him as Lord. When she says in verse 14, "The hand of the LORD has gone out against me!", by that very statement she acknowledges Jehovah, the God of Israel, as the true God. With that

we learn that in all her time in Moab, and her time as a widow in Moab, she has not forgotten nor left Jehovah God. Nor has she attached herself to the gods of the Moabites.

Well, when Orpah began to prepare to go back, Naomi said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." It seems strange that Naomi would encourage Ruth to go back to her gods. But one must remember that she lived in Israel when many had forsaken Jehovah God, and she had lived some time now in Moab and maybe her own faith was weak, as she sensed her God, Jehovah God had gone out against her.

May I ask, is there some mother whose faith has grown weak? Let me remind you that Ruth lived in a day when she did not even carry a Bible! There was very little of the revealed Word of God even written back then, and there were very few copies of those available. She had endured those years without the constant comfort of the Bible that we enjoy. May I recommend another thing every mother here ought to be thankful for? You have open and free access to the entire Word of God. You have the promises left to us by the Lord Jesus Christ and other writers of the NT. Jesus Himself said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

And then, in our text, follow some verses of which Charles Ryrie says, "Ruth's statement of commitment is perhaps the most beautiful in all literature..." So look at it in verses 16-17 (read). Now consider what that says of both Naomi and Ruth. Of Naomi, a mother-in-law it speaks volumes. Ruth had learned to love this woman. She respected her and she had found comfort with her and solace and security. No doubt she had longings for her family, but she had found a better. She could not endure life away from her mother-in-law. No doubt, Ruth did not tell any mother-in-law jokes. A mother-in-law is a mother. And from Ruth we learn what a mother Naomi must have been.

And notice that she did not say, "Please do not urge me to go back." She said, "Please do not urge me to

leave you!" It was not that she wanted to be away from her home. It was that she did not want to be away from this mother-in-law who had now become her mother! And then she said, "And do not urge me to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

Now earlier we reprimanded Naomi a bit for urging her daughters-in-law to return to their gods. But note now that Ruth has learned to love Naomi's God. I would suppose that thought Naomi did not have a Bible, she recounted to her daughters-in-law the history of Israel that she must have heard many times. I would suppose she told Ruth about Jehovah God who created everything in six days and how the Jews came into being and how God led them and how they were captives in Egypt and how God delivered them.

And probably Ruth put together those stories and the stories she had heard as a Moabitess and she said to herself, "I believe Jehovah God is the true God. And the clearest evidence of that is my mother-in-law." And I suppose she found peace with God and I suppose that she said, "I cannot endure to live with those gods I have been brought up with." And so she said to Naomi, "Your God shall be my God."

And now, may I encourage you mothers, teach your children about the Lord. Take the Bible and read to them. And then, do not contradict the message of the Bible with a life that is different from what you read to your children from the Bible. Live a life that complements what the Bible says, and you will be a great mother, and your in-laws will learn to respect both you and the God you believe in.

And so Ruth finished like this, "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The LORD..." Do you know what name that is? That is the same one Naomi used in verse 13, Jehovah. The LORD, the One who is over all. And she said, "The LORD do so to me and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

And when Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. And reading between the verses, she was glad in her heart that she

couldn't talk her out of coming with her, and the two of them went on their way to Bethlehem, and they both lived happily ever after, well at least happiness returned to their home and since you all have a Bible, you can read it in the rest of the story.

CONCL: Well, let us conclude. I understand that the Jewish people have a tradition of reading the book of Ruth at Pentecost. It would seem to me that it would be read at the feast of First Fruits as Naomi and Ruth arrived at Bethlehem during the barley harvest (1:22). It seems no one knows for certain why they read this book at the feast of Pentecost. But maybe Ruth and Boaz got married at Pentecost. However all that may be, today we set aside especially to remember Mother's. May the Lord bless our mothers this morning. May each mother be encouraged to never give up but to keep on keeping on no matter what life brings them until the Lord comes or calls them away.

You see, if you do not give up, who is to tell what you, as a mother, may have for an impact on the world in a generation or 2 or 10. I want to do a Paul Harvey and tell you the rest of the story. I haven't told you the whole story yet. For the rest of the story we go to Matthew 1 in the New Testament. Let us begin reading in verse 1.

"1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: 2 Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah begot Perez and Zerah **by Tamar.**" Woa, just a minute. Tamar? What is a woman doing in this genealogy. But here is a mother who by all odds should have ended up a failure, but here she is mentioned in a genealogy when women are not usually mentioned in genealogies. But we go on, "Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. 4 Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. 5 Salmon begot Boaz." Woa there! Just a minute. Is this the Boaz that is in the story of Ruth? Yes. But look at this, Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab! Now just a minute. Do you mean the Rahab who was the harlot in Jericho? Yes, that very one! Now just a minute, was Rahab not a harlot and a Gentile woman? Yes, you got that right. She could have been a great failure. But she became a godly mother in Israel. She was saved from the fall of Jericho by faith, changed her occupation, married a Jewish man and became a great mother in Israel! But we go on, "Boaz begot Obed by Ruth." Now, just a minute. Is this also the Ruth of the book of

Ruth? Yes, the very one! Here is another woman who might have died a failure. But she too became a great mother in Israel. She never gave up. She too was a Gentile. She too married a Jewish man and became a great mother in Israel. And so we go on, "Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse." Just a minute, please. Is this the Jesse who was the father of king David?" Well, you see, if you didn't interrupt all the time I would be able to tell you the rest of the story. So we read on, "6 and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon." Just a minute, do you mean the Solomon who was born of that woman Bathsheba who was unfaithful to her husband? Yes, most certainly. Listen to what it says, "David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife of Uriah.*"

Now I am not encouraging that if you will become a loser you will be a winner in the end. I am encouraging that if you feel you are a loser, if you amend your ways there are yet great possibilities for you.

Now, mothers, did you note all these women mentioned in this genealogy? Did you know that it is not usually so done? And did you know that in all Naomi's troubles she never left Jehovah God, and because she never gave up, she became the great, great, great, and several more greats, great grandmother of Jesus, the Son of God? May I ask you, what about yourself? Will you give up? In this task of training up children and in this life of motherhood that is filled with challenges, will you keep on training your children and teaching them about the Lord?

Have you pondered that all of these men mentioned had wives but these four women mentioned are the most unlikely candidates to be named in this genealogy? Each one of them was a likely candidate for failurehood, but in motherhood she became one link in the line of the Messiah, the Son of God! And so we could read a number more begats until we come to these words, "16 And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." There we have the fifth mother mentioned in a genealogy of men. And now you know the rest of the story, and God bless you on this fine mother's day.