

Faith & Love That Cling

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“Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.” Ruth 1:14

The verse above presents a beautiful picture of devoted faith and love. After the tragedy of losing her husband and two sons Naomi desperately abandoned Moab for her homeland in Bethlehem, where there were stories of renewed prosperity. Years before, hardship drove her family from the land of Israel, the place of God’s provision and blessing – beloved *Eretz Israel*, as a Hebrew would habitually call it, thereby indicating that no other land was like the one given to them by the Lord. In spite of his pious-sounding name, when famine stalked the land Elimelech¹ decamped for Gentile territory in search of a fruitful way of life. Of course the adverse agricultural situation reflected the spiritual departure within the nation itself. These were the days of the Judges, when “...*there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judg. 21:25.) God had forewarned the Israelites of the dire discipline that would befall them if they departed from serving Him and turned to idols. Conversely, He promised to bless their land and give them the early and latter rains which were essential for fecundity (Deut. 11:13-17.) If they did turn from the Lord, the remedy would be found in heartfelt repentance, rather than in fleeing to greener pastures in neighboring nations. (Abraham’s woeful experience during a famine in Genesis 12:10-20 demonstrated the folly of going elsewhere during hard times.) Sadly, Elimelech led his family to nearby Moab to their cost.

God’s Unfailing Mercy Confronts Human Failure

Despite the human failure evidenced in what befell Elimelech’s family, God was working to bless the widows Naomi and Ruth. Through this destitute pair He would also bring about unlikely benefits to Israel extending to David’s time and beyond to the line of the Messiah, Christ Jesus Himself. Although Moabites were ordinarily prohibited from reception into the congregation unto the tenth generation, the Lord graciously received Ruth into Israel and used her as an ancestress of the Christ (Deut. 23:3; Matt. 1:5.) At the time of Ruth chapter 1, however, things looked much bleaker to the three grieving widows.

Thinking practically, Naomi strongly urged her two daughters-in-law to return to their parents’ homes, where they would have better prospects of finding new husbands. Conventional wisdom would say this was sound strategy for there were few other economic possibilities for widows in those days; they were among society’s most vulnerable members. *The New English Translation* graphically depicts the women’s response: “Again they wept loudly. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth **clung tightly** to her” (Ruth 1:14, emphasis mine.) As one of the translator’s remarks in a study note: “Orpah is a commendable and devoted person (see v. 8); after all she is willing to follow Naomi back to Judah. However, when Naomi bombards her with good reasons why she should return, she relents. But Ruth is special. Despite Naomi’s bitter

tirade, she insists on staying. Orpah is a good person, but Ruth is beyond good – **she possesses an extra measure of devotion and sacrificial love that is uncommon.**ⁱⁱ Putting it succinctly, Ruth possessed the love and faith that cling.

Holding On For Dear, Eternal Life

The faith that is of eternal value is confidence in the true and living God. As Hebrews 11:6 expresses it: “...he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”ⁱⁱⁱ Trust in Him is never misplaced, for He is true and faithful (Deut. 7:9.) Ruth looked beyond self-effort and human aid to the Lord, who is merciful and able to save. Accordingly she clung to her mother-in-law, her only link to Israel’s God.

Those who are born again by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ have an enduring type of faith, which is illustrated by Ruth’s actions. It clings to the Lord in life’s storms, forsaking the easy pathway for a life of trust in the Lord. Believers from ancient times to the present day endure persecution, illness, humiliation, material privation, and all manner of tribulations. Nevertheless, they bear it with God’s help, and cling to the Lord who will faithfully complete the new creation He has begun in them (Phil. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:17.) They love Him who first loved them, and walk through the valley of the shadow of death by His gentle leading (1 Jn. 4:9-10; Psa. 23:4.) Sometimes in hard circumstances all they can do is cling – just hang on to the Lord as the clouds pass overhead. In clinging to Him, the Christian has an unmovable rock. What is more, He will never let go of His people (Jn. 10:27-30.)

ⁱ Elimelech literally means “My God is king” in Hebrew – an ironic name under the circumstances, seeing that he ignored God’s word & fled to enemy territory in troubled times.

ⁱⁱ *The NET Bible First Edition* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006.) <http://bible.org/netbible/index.htm> ; emphasis mine.

ⁱⁱⁱ Verses appear in the *New King James Version* unless otherwise noted.