

Ruth's Faithfulness

Ruth, Pt. 1

Ruth 1

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I. PRAYER

- i. God, we pray that you would grow our faithfulness to you and your Word as we learn to trust in your faithfulness to us.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. Well, this morning is the last Sunday in January.

- i. This means we are getting close to a full 30 days since you made your New Years resolutions – if you made them.
 - How's it going?
 1. You know, we're coming up on that time where that initial energy burst that we had that was fueling all of that motivation seems to have vaporized...and now we're back to real life...
 2. ...maybe we've gone back to how we've always done things because it's just easier and life is busy and complicated...
 - I told you that one of my resolutions this year was to complete a half marathon in September.
 1. So, of course I have been running most days...
 2. Except I took a week off because I was out of the country traveling for a week...so of course...you can't exercise and travel at the same time...no one does that.
- ii. But why is it always sooo hard, for a lot of people, to be FAITHFUL to the commitments and resolutions that they make?



- Faithfulness. I feel like this is a character quality that we all admire in others but when we look at ourselves, it seems so elusive and unattainable to us.
 1. Everybody else has no trouble with faithfulness, but I do.
 2. Everybody else faithfully exercises...I don't.
 3. ...is faithful with their money...I'm not.
 4. ...is faithful to read their Bible...I'm not,
 - It just seems so hard to grow in.
- iii. **Why? Well, let me define faithfulness for us.**
- Here is my definition of faithfulness:
faithfulness is behavior motivated by belief.
 (repeat)
 - When we say that we want to grow in faithfulness...what we are saying is that we want to change our behavior.
 1. I want to stop being lazy and I want to start exercising.
 2. I want to stop sleeping in and I want to start getting up early to spend time with God.
 3. I want to stop looking at my phone so much and I want to start being more attentive to the people around me.
 - And we all wish that changing our behavior and growing in faithfulness was as easy as making the decision.
 1. Like it is some sort of switch that we can flip and it's done.
 2. But we know its not that easy.



iv. **But faithfulness is behavior motivated by belief.**

- All of our decisions and all of our behaviors are motivated by something we believe.
 1. And so changing our behaviors and habits are difficult because we are actually talking about changing our beliefs.
 2. And we can't just flip a switch and change our beliefs.
- This is why if you want to start faithfully exercising...
 1. You have to get the accountability and find other ways to externally motivate yourself so you start doing it enough that you actually begin to see the benefits of regular exercise.
 2. Because once you start to experience those benefits...I feel great, I feel healthier, I'm more flexible, I have less pain, etc...you begin to believe that the benefits of exercise are worth the discomfort of exercise.
 3. And once you begin to believe that, you start to be more faithful to regularly exercising without accountability - because your behavior is now motivated by internal belief.

v. **And I believe that as followers of Jesus, we all desire to grow in our faithfulness to God.**

- To live our lives trusting in God, following his Word, living within his will, believing what He has to say over and above the world...
 1. But it's hard. It's not like we can just flip a switch and change overnight.



2. Because there is a war of belief waging inside of us.
 3. We are constantly barraged with reasons by the world to not trust God or believe his Word.
 4. And wavering belief kills faithfulness.
- This is what I want to talk about this morning.
- vi. I want us to learn from the life of a young, insignificant, immigrant widow named Ruth whose faithfulness to God was unwavering even though it would seem she had every reason to not be.

III. RUTH

a. **We read Ruth 1 together earlier in our service but allow me to remind us of the story we read in ch. 1 together.**

- i. There was a man named Elimelech.
- Elimelech lived in Bethlehem in Judah and had a wife, named Naomi, and two sons – Mahlon and Chilion.
 1. Now, there was a famine in Israel so Elimelech decides to leave Israel and take his family to Moab (modern day Jordan).
 - But while they were in Moab, Elimelech dies making Naomi a widow.
 1. Now, as tragic as this is, Naomi still had her two sons to take care of her.
 2. This is a very patriarchal society and widows (especially widows without sons) had a very difficult time. But at least Naomi still had Mahlon and Chilion.



- And they take Moabite women as their wives.
 1. But, it was extremely frowned upon for Israelites to intermarry with Moabites.
 2. First, Moabites did not worship the God of the Bible.
 3. Secondly, the Israelites had some trouble with the Moabites during their time in the desert on their way to the promised land and God has prohibited any Moabite from entering the Assembly of the Lord for ten generations in response!
 4. So, this is problematic.
- But Mahlon marries Ruth and Chilion marries Orpah.
 1. And this mixed family lives together for 10 years in Moab without having children.
 2. I think one could assume that Ruth and Orpah were barren.
 3. But tragedy strikes the story again because both Mahlon and Chilion die!
 4. So, now, we have an Israelite widow living in Moab with her two Moabite daughters-in-law who are also widows and childless!
 5. This was a scary situation for them.
- ii. **So, one day, Naomi hears that the famine was finished in Israel and that God had provided his people with food. So, Naomi decides to go home back to Bethlehem.**
 - But she tells both Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab.
 1. Hopefully they will find husbands in Moab, have children, and find rest and security.



- And initially, both Ruth and Orpah insist that they come back to Israel with Naomi.
 1. But Naomi pushes back.
 2. She knows that she is too old to marry again and have children that could become husbands to Ruth and Orpah.
 3. And since these women are Moabites, they probably would not find husbands back in Israel.
 4. And because a woman would not be in a secure place without a husband in this society, she insisted that they stay in Moab.
- iii. So, Orpah takes the advice and stays in Moab but Ruth remains faithful to Naomi.
 - And I want to read for you the interaction between Ruth and Naomi when Naomi realizes that Ruth isn't going anywhere.
 1. **Read Ruth 1:15-18.** [Emphasize Orpah going back to the gods of the Moabites and Ruth remaining faith to YHWH.]
 - And they returned to Bethlehem. And Ruth faithfully clings to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

IV. THE FAITHFULNESS OF RUTH

a. Why was Ruth so faithful to her commitment to Naomi while Orpah decided to stay back in Moab?

- i. I think this is something that is really important for us to analyze this morning because when you look at all the details of the story, Ruth had every reason not to be faithful to Naomi.



- The variables and circumstances were stacked against her.
- It would have made sense for her to do what Orpah did.

b. And as we look at the text this morning, I think we can identify four different threats to Ruth's faithfulness...four different reasons why many of us would have thrown in the towel if we were her...but she overcomes all of them somehow.

- So, let's look at these four threats to Ruth's faithfulness.

i. #1 – Easier Option

- It's the option that Naomi insisted she take and that her sister-in-law Orpah took.
 1. Stay in Moab, where you're from, find a husband, buy a house, have some kids.
 2. You'll be financially stable.
 3. You'll know people and have friends close by.
 4. No one would blame you. You lost your husband and you're really not obligated to stick with Naomi.
- But what does Ruth do?
 1. **Read v.16a.**

ii. #2 – Didn't Belong

- Ruth was a Moabite and not an Israelite.
 1. She didn't belong in Israel.
 2. What were people going to think about her or say about her?
- Also, when Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem, many of Naomi's old neighbors recognized her. And look what Naomi says to them:



1. Read Ruth 1:20-21a
 2. How do you think that made Ruth feel?
 3. She is risking everything to stay with Naomi and Naomi is saying that she has returned empty?
 4. Did Naomi think Ruth belonged?
- But what does Ruth do?
 1. Read v.16b.
 2. It didn't matter if other people thought Ruth belonged, she knew where she belonged.
- iii. **#3 – Uncertain Future**
- Like we said earlier, this was a patriarchal society.
 1. Ruth was a childless widow who also was an immigrant.
 2. That is a recipe for no future!
 3. How was she going to find a husband who would take care of her and provide for her?
 - But what does Ruth do?
 1. Read v.17.
 - Sure, Ruth had no certainty or control over her future.
 1. But that didn't deter her from being faithful to Naomi.
 2. All she knew, was that she was going to stay by Naomi's side until death.
- iv. **#4 – Wounds from the Past**
- Look at v.20-21 again with me.
 1. Ruth and Naomi had suffered through unspeakable tragedy.
 2. And we see here that Naomi is discouraged and her faith in God is shaky.
 3. She is angry and bitter for what she's experienced.



4. She's wounded. And when we are wounded and confused, it's hard to be faithful.

- But somehow this trauma didn't shake Ruth's faithfulness.

c. So, what is it about Ruth that makes her so strong and faithful? What is it about Ruth where she was able to overcome these threats to her faithfulness?

i. Well, remember we said that faithfulness is behavior motivated by belief.

- And whatever it was that Ruth believed in, it was strong enough to overcome these threats.

ii. And we know that when Ruth married into this Israelite family, she came to know and believe in the God of Israel...the God of the Bible...YHWH...the God we worship today.

- And the book of Ruth introduces us to an attribute of God that is key to understanding the story of Ruth and the rest of the Bible.
 1. This is an attribute of God that is the anchor of Ruth's faithfulness and must be the anchor to our faithfulness to God.
 2. If this is not at the core of our belief in God, then we will not be able to withstand the threats to our faithfulness to God like Ruth was able to.
- And that attribute is God's faithfulness to us. God's consistency. The fact that God is perfectly faithful and never fails.



1. We see Naomi mention this in **Ruth 1:8**.
2. That word “kindly” there is a loaded word. Doesn’t seem like much in this verse but it’s an important word to understand your relationship with God.
3. It’s the word “*HESED*” in Hebrew and can also be translated the steadfast love of God, the loving kindness of God, the faithful love of God.
4. So, Naomi is saying to Ruth and Orpah: “May God deal with you faithfully...may God deal with you according to his steadfast love.”
5. Maybe the best translation is provided by the Jesus Storybook Bible for kids: “*a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.*”
6. It’s the kind of love that a parent has for a child. It is a fierce love that is perfectly faithful...it never fades no matter the circumstance.

iii. **And this word will pop-up again as a key theme in the book of Ruth...**

- And what we need to see this morning is that Ruth’s faithfulness was motivated by God’s faithfulness to her.
 1. Ruth’s faithfulness is motivated by her belief that God has a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love for her.
- And this is vastly different than Naomi, who believed that God was opposed to her and not for her.
 1. I like the CSB translation of Ruth 1:21b - **“Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed me...”**



- iv. There is a direct correlation between Ruth's view of God and her faithfulness and Naomi's view of God and her bitterness.
 - Ruth believed that even in the midst of all of the tragedy, pain, and uncertainty, that God still loved her and was working toward her good.
 1. And because she believed in the faithfulness of God, she lived a faithful life.

d. And Ruth doesn't know this yet, but as we continue to study her life in the book of Ruth we are going to see God's faithfulness to her.

- i. We are going to see how God is going to use all of the hardship that she has endured for her good.
 - She doesn't know the specifics yet, but she trusts God...she remains faithful.
- ii. And not only are we going to see how God will use all of Ruth's hardship for her good, we are going to see how God will use all of Ruth's hardship as a part of his grand plan of redemption - the gospel!
 - You know what Ruth knows right, she knows she is a childless, immigrant, widow living in Bethlehem.
 1. But she trusts God.
 - And what she doesn't know yet is that her name will be mentioned in the fifth verse of our New Testament, Matthew 1:5, listed as a direct ancestor to Jesus Christ.



1. She doesn't know this yet, but this childless, widow will be the great grandmother of King David.
- iii. And through the line of Ruth will come God's ultimate display of his Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love for us....Jesus.

V. GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE

- a. **Understand this, God loves us so much that even though we have sinned against him, even though we reject His Word, he has pursued after us!**
 - i. He sent Jesus to deal with our sin...by dying on the cross in our place.
 - He sent Jesus to give us his righteousness...by living a life we could never live!
 - He sent Jesus to come and get us and bring us into His family underneath the love of a perfectly faithful father.
 - ii. **All that he requires is that we recognize our sin, repent, and receive the love of Christ.**
 - Trusting that we can only be right with God by trusting in Jesus and not trusting ourselves.
 - This is what it means to follow Jesus. Not that we are faithful. But we repent of our unfaithfulness and throw ourselves upon the faithfulness of Jesus.



1. And if you're here and you don't trust in Jesus or you are not sure of what you believe about Jesus, you need to know that God's love is available to you this morning if you trust in Jesus.
 2. You don't need to recite specific prayers, take pilgrimages, or learn some religious lingo.
 3. We trust in Jesus not ourselves to be right with God.
- iii. God loves you so much, get this, that he decided that your relationship with him is not going to be contingent upon your faithfulness...rather your relationship with God is contingent on His faithfulness.
- You don't keep yourself in the love of God by being faithful, he keeps you in his love by his faithfulness.
 - This is God's Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.
- b. But, all of God's children, as those who are recipients of the faithful love of God, have a God-given, innate desire to live a life of faithfulness back to God.**
- i. It's one of the ways we know who is a child of God and who isn't.
 - God's children desire to be faithful back to God.
 - ii. But even when we desire to be faithful to God, it's not easy, we're not perfect.
 - Which is why we need to learn from Ruth.
 - And Ruth teaches us that our faithfulness to God has to be motivated by God's faithfulness to us.



1. If it's not, we won't be able to withstand the everyday threats to faithfulness in the way Ruth was able to.

c. Threats like comfort.

- i. As we try and live lives of faithfulness to God, we will have moments where being faithful to God will be the hard, less comfortable option.
 - And we'll be tempted to go the more comfortable, easier route like Orpah did.
- ii. Maybe you have an opportunity to share your faith with someone or maybe its carving out time in the morning to start your day in God's Word.
 - We'll always be tempted to take the easier route.
 1. To avoid an awkward social encounter or to sleep in.
- iii. And if we have a view of God like Naomi's view of God...where we see God as opposed to us because we haven't been as faithful as we ought to be...we'll cave to that threat every time.
 - The only motivation we'll have to share our faith with someone is to score faithfulness points with God.
 1. Points that he's not even keeping.
 - That would also be the only reason to read our Bibles too.



- iv. But when we believe in the faithful love of God towards us like Ruth...when we believe that our relationship with him is not anchored in our faithfulness but in God's faithfulness...that becomes an unlimited source of motivation to be faithful to God and His Word.
 - Because we're not sharing our faith to score points with God...we're sharing our faith because we have experienced the Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love of God and we want others to have that hope as well.
- v. We don't read our Bibles to check the box.
 - We read our Bibles because in it we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us and how he has called us to live.

d. Or let's talk about the threat of insecurity.

- i. We have an insecurity epidemic in the church...this fear of what people are really thinking about us...this fear that that we don't really belong...this fear that if people really knew everything about us, they would reject us or worse, laugh.
 - Maybe you're a new Christian and you don't know a lot of the Bible. Or you have struggles that people don't know about. Or your past is really colorful and your ashamed of it. Or whatever makes you feel like you don't belong.



- If we have a view of God like Naomi's...that God is opposed to us because we're not as good as we ought to be...insecurity will rule our heart.
 1. Our faith will exasperate our greatest fear... that we don't belong. We don't belong in the church and we don't belong to God.
 2. That he is just as ashamed of us as we are ashamed of ourselves.
- ii. **This type of insecurity will kill our faithfulness to God because all of our efforts to be faithful will be motivated by wanting to fit in.**
 - But, we don't belong in the church or to God because of our Bible knowledge, our affinity to Christian culture, our clean past, or because of our lack of struggle.
 - We belong to God because he directed his Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love at us.
- iii. **AND THAT IS ALL OF US. No one belongs to God or the church for any other reason than this. God's faithfulness.**
 - We are all the same. And if we are all the same than we can all be fully known (all the good and all the bad) and fully loved.
- e. **And, finally, what about the threat of the future and the past?**
 - i. We noticed earlier that Ruth could have been derailed by having a very uncertain future or because of the wounds from her past.



- And if we have a view of God like Naomi...where we see God as opposed to us because we haven't been as faithful as we ought to be...then we'll interpret our past as God's punishment, and we'll fear what God will do to us in the future.
- ii. **But God's faithfulness is perfect, it's above time, it's unstoppable, it's irreversible...to where God can take the worst parts of our past and use them for our good and his glory in the future.**
- I've seen God take convicted drug dealers who got saved in prison and use the skills they learned dealing drugs to do other things for God's glory around the world.
 1. This person could have been derailed by the shame of their past and a fear that they had no future.
 2. But God redeemed all of that because he's faithful. He's in control.
 - I've seen God take former atheists who diligently studied why no one should believe in God, save them, and then give them a ministry reaching other atheists.
 - I've seen God take a horrific accident, my friend breaking his neck and being paralyzed from the chest down and give him a ministry at the rehab center to other people who had similar accidents.
- iii. **Because our relationship with God is anchored in his faithfulness to us, there is nothing in our past that he can't use and redeem, and you have no idea what God has for you in the future.**



- We have nothing to be ashamed of in our past because Jesus has covered all of it and we have nothing to fear in the future because God loves us with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.

VI. CONCLUSION

a. So, what you need to spend some time thinking about this morning is this:

- i. Do I view God like Naomi?**
 - Do I see God as opposed to me because I'm not faithful enough?
 - Is God's faithfulness and goodness to me dependent on how faithful I am?
- ii. Or, do I view God like Ruth?**
 - Do I understand that my relationship with God is not anchored in my faithfulness but his faithfulness?
 - That he's got me...and I can trust him.
- iii. These are polar opposite views of God.**
 - One leads to faithlessness and the other leads to faithfulness.

VII. PRAY

