

Ruth 1:6-18

Are You a Pragmatist?

I. The Hopeless Crescendo

A. Naomi, Orpah and Ruth were left in a desperate situation.

They lived in a patriarchal society and there were few options for single or widowed women. Support systems were at the clan or family level and they were without husbands or sons.

B. In the midst of this terrible situation Naomi hears God has intervened on behalf of the people of Ephraim in Bethlehem, the breadbasket of Israel was being filled again by God's hand. The Lord had given them food. **She is determined to return home and live out her days among her own people as best she can.**

C. At first Naomi and both daughter in laws set out on this journey together but Naomi thinks better of it and tells the women to return to their own people. She in affect tells them, **“I am not your mother to care for you. Return to your own mother and let her help you find a husband and restart your life.”**

D. Naomi doesn't say this harshly or in an unkind way. She herself had been living in a land among a people who were not her own. She knew what it was like to be a foreigner and an alien

in a strange land. She loved these women and didn't want them to suffer the hardships and rejection she herself had likely suffered in Moab.

E. Naomi also knew there was no future prospects for the women to find husbands through her. The normal protocol for Israelite women in the situation in which Ruth and Orpah found themselves would be to marry another brother in the family.

F. Deuteronomy 25:5-6, ““If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”

G. This may seem strange to us but we have to remember the eastern view of marriage. There was no dating or online dating sites. Marriages were arranged. Women found security in marriage and had almost no option to work outside the home other than prostitution. The family protected these women by providing a new spouse and the prospects for a family.

H. (Ultimately we are going to see this law/custom play out in the life of Ruth and her marriage to Boaz...but more on that later!)

- I. What seems strange to us is a genuine act of love and care toward widows and a practical act to perpetuate the name and property rights of the family.**
- J. Ruth and Orpah had been good to Naomi. They had shown her “Hesed”** a Hebrew word which effectively combines love and kindness. They had shown a deep love toward Naomi demonstrated in their kindness to her.
- K. Naomi wants what is best for them. She sees her life as cursed, she says, “The hand of the Lord is against me” in verse 13.** She is too old to remarry and have a family and even if she were able, these women could never wait for the sons to grow up and marry them.
- L. She loves these two and wants them to have a future...she truly believes there is none to be found with her.**
- M. Hope — an expectation of good. Naomi had none...believed she had none to offer so in an act of unselfishness, a true act of love, encourages these women to leave her and go home.**

I. The Difference Between a Kiss and a Cling

- A. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, returned to her people AND her gods. That second phrase is significant. She may have loved Naomi and been good to her, but she had no faith in her God or for a future with her.
- B. This part of the book tells the story of what is genuinely in the heart of these two women and why one was chosen to be the Great grandmother of King David and Jesus while the other walked into obscurity.**
- C. **Orpah was pragmatic...**
- D. While driving home from school with my daughter who was in the third grade at the time, I thought I would see if she was an optimist or a pessimist. She was a very articulate third grader, and we often had "deep" discussions for her age. I turned to her and said: "If a glass was half-filled with water, would you say it was half-full or half-empty?" She quickly looked up at me and said, "Well Daddy, it depends on whether you were filling the glass or emptying it!" She was a pragmatist.**
- E. Pragmatism — A practical approach to problems and affairs...leaning on one's own understanding**
- F. What Naomi said to Orpah made sense to her. Here is the limit of pragmatism...a pragmatist looks at all evidence and does what

makes sense to them. Orpah's marriage was over and she felt the best prospect for a future was in the home of her mother. Yahweh and the people of Yahweh had brought pain and misfortune to her life and she was going back to her people and their gods.

G. **Ruth was full of faith...**

H. **Ruth believed in God and placed her trust in Him...not in her own understanding or ability.**

I. **In the world of trapeze performance, there are "flyers" and there are "catchers." Imagine yourself a trapeze flyer sailing through the air, flipping as you go. Then at the end of your rotation, as you hang in mid-air, you see the catcher. Your natural impulse is to reach out and grab for him. That's certainly what I would do. I'd grab anything I could -- his hands, his arms, his shirt, his hair. It wouldn't matter. I'm grabbing a hold of something, anything, and hanging on to it for dear life! But the flyer is trained to resist this impulse. He understands that it is preemptive for him to attempt to catch the catcher. Any such attempt would actually prevent the catcher from performing his task. "The flyer is the one who lets go and the catcher is the one who catches. The flyer must never try to catch the catcher!"**

J. Ruth was determined to let God catch her. Allow Him to be her security and future...trust Him for her life.

- K. Faith — Trust and belief in God which results in a changed life.**
- L. Ruth clung not only to Naomi but to the God of Naomi. A God she had followed with her husband and family for over 10 years. She had repented long ago of the life she had lived as a moabite. She had turned her heart and life over to Yahweh. Things had been bad but she had not lost her faith in Him for a future. She believed in and trusted God for what she could not see...She depended upon His character and ability to move on her behalf.
- M. Our choices are driven by pragmatism or faith. We lean on our own understanding or trust, believe and have faith in God.**
- N. Orpah was the pragmatist. Ruth lived her life by faith. The results speak for themselves...**
- O. We never hear of Orpah again and it is all we can do to save her name correctly thanks to Oprah Winfrey. Ruth becomes a vital, significant player in the story of God's redemption of humanity.**
- P. Pragmatism gives a kiss and tear filled goodbye to both Naomi and Yahweh. Faith clings to both Naomi and Yahweh.**
- Q. At this point Naomi isn't a faith filled encourager. She believes God has cursed her...She encourages Ruth to be practical and do what her sister in law had chosen for herself.**

Ruth's response demonstrates her faith...a faith that will carry Naomi through her darkness and lead to a new life for both of them.

R. There are two key phrases in Ruth's words to Naomi, "your God will be my God" and the vow she takes in the name of Yahweh. The vow in particular indicates that she has stopped living a life devoted to the false gods of Moab and has believed in Yahweh.

S. Ruth is in affect saying, I love you! I love your God! I love the life you showed me when I married your son! I repented of my gods and former life long ago. I serve the living God now! Don't discourage me from the new life I have in the one true God!

T. That's what happens when you begin to live your faith in God experientially. When it is more than head knowledge and has become a heart knowledge. When you don't just know about God...you know God. You can never turn back again to your old way of living.

U. Once you begin to live by faith the old pragmatic ways just won't work for your anymore.

V. Ruth refused to lean on her own understanding. She acknowledged God in her circumstances. She believed in Him.

She placed her trust in His character and ability. She set her heart on a course unknown with faith for a future in Him.

I. Conclusion

- A. When we choose to live a life of faith in Christ it radically alters our life. There is a complete reordering in our life. Ruth knew this.** She said, “Where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there will I be buried.”
- B.** A life of faith turns control over to the God and His plans...this means He has the right to do what He wants and to be in the center of His plans often means a reordering of the life we have made using our own plans.
- C. Ruth knew her life of faith meant a radical departure from what she had known and done up to this point. God had a future and that future wouldn't look like the past.**
- D. Here is where so many of us shrink back into pragmatism when confronted with the opportunity for faith...**
- E. Orpah looked for security in what she could see and know... She searched for hope and a future in what she could know and do for herself.**

F. Ruth found security by her faith in God. She believed God for hope and a future...trusting what He knows and what He can do.

G. It's much easier to be an Orpah than a Ruth. Much easier to be a pragmatist than live life by faith.

H. You cannot live life by faith and pragmatism...and here is why...

**I. Manley Beasley — “Faith is acting as though a thing is so, when it is not so, in order for it to be so, because it is so.”
Because God has said it is so!**

J. Pragmatism requires something to be realized before it is believed in...faith believes in something so it may be realized.

If you have faith in God He will reward you with Himself... you will realize a relationship with Him...He will become a reality to you...If you have faith in God for His plans, provision and the life He intends for you to live all of these things will be realized...but until you have faith you will never have or participate in a relationship with Him or anything He has for you.

K. When God shows us what He is doing and invites us to be a part of His plans, it will always require a step of faith on our part to participate. At that moment there will be a crisis of faith...will we believe and trust or become a pragmatist. What has your answer

been? What will your answer be today? Do you want to be an Orpah or a Ruth? Will you choose faith?