

Ruth’s Heartfelt Confession of God

Preached in New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church, Middleville, MI, on Sunday morning, March 6, 2022 by C. VanSteenselen.

Text: Ruth 1:11-18

Psalter 70:1-2

Psalter 336

Psalter 383:3,5

Psalter 196

Congregation,

He was arrested on Friday. Many weapons are pointed at him. He refuses to escape. He allows them willingly to be bound. He asks if he may eat something and then pray for one hour. They allow him. After that, he is brought to the arena. The leader asks his name, “Are you ___?” He answers, “Yes, I am.” The governor tries to persuade him to change his mind, “Swear! Reproach Christ, and I will set you free!” What is his answer? Would he deny Jesus Christ? No. His heart will be revealed. He says, “86 years have I served Christ. He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” The governor tries one more time, “We have wild animals here. If you do not repent, I will throw you before them.” The man answers, “I will be glad. Then all my evil will change into righteousness.” Then the executioner comes. He stabs his sword at the man and kills him. This is the history of Polycarp. The preacher of Smyrna (160 AD). He died as a martyr. Also, today, two women are tried. One will have the same confession as Polycarp. The other will return to the world.

Theme: Ruth’s Heartfelt Confession of God

I. Ruth’s Heart Tried

II. Ruth’s Heart Revealed

I. Ruth’s Heart Tried

In Relation to Earthly Welfare

In our first point, we will see the heart of Ruth tried. This is tried in two different ways. The first one is with earthly things. We read this in the verses 11-13. Naomi shows that she will have no earthly welfare. Only difficulties will be her lot. This is shown in the four questions that Naomi asks. It is to make her think to go back to Moab. What questions do we speak about? First, “Why will you go with me?” (1:11). Second, “Will I have any more children (1:11). Third, “Would you wait, if I bare children, to wait until they are grown?” (1:13). Fourth, “Would stay for them to have them as husbands?” (1:13). Not only does Naomi ask questions. No, she also commands them three times, “turn again” (2x in 1:11-12), and “go” (1:12). She presses these two ladies. Why is that? Well, she foresees challenges in the future. What things? This is the main theme of verses 11-13. What is that? Marriage. We find the word “husband” four times in these verses. But why would it not be possible? First, Naomi is currently not pregnant (1:11). Second, she is too old to have another husband (1:12). Third, if she would marry and get a child, would these ladies wait to have them as husbands? Fourth, others in Israel would not marry these Moabitish women. Do we see, congregation, how Ruth is tested? As it were Naomi says, “Ruth, you will only have a hopeless future. No husband, no children. Only suppression.” How do we think this felt for Ruth? We do not know. It could have made her think, “Shall I return?”

Application

Congregation, how would we respond if we were told, “If you become a child of God, you will have no future in the world”? The Bible even goes further, “In the world ye [the true believer] shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). They will be persecuted and have difficulties. Christ even speaks of hatred (John 15:18). This can include our best friends, if they are no true Christians. Maybe in the future, if we want to remain Scriptural, we might be cast into prison. Would we still want to be converted? Or are we only looking after external advantages? Let us test our own heart. Can we honestly say, “If everything will be taken away, I would still cling to the LORD?” Not only Scripture but also the devil tells you, “If you are converted, you can no longer watch those videos! You have no career. No, you have to stay a mom and may not work on Sundays. You cannot make money, because you have always to be honest. Others will bully and ridicule you. Is that what you want? That kind of life is so restricted. It determines who you can marry and what you can do. It is only rules, rules and even more rules! Is that not too much? But if you remain

unconverted, you can truly enjoy life. Then you will have pleasure. Is that not what you want?” That is what he tells. But the problem is, this is a half-truth. It is certainly true, God’s children will often not be rich in this world or have the highest position. But they will have a good conscience and true joy. If you know of this, hearers, you can confirm it, to know Christ is far better than anything in this world. Congregation, how do you respond to the challenges of a true believer? Are you able to affirm them but do you also know of that joy? Or do you reject this life? If we look to our text, Naomi tests her daughters-in-law also in another area. That is the discipline of the LORD. His heavy hand.

In Relation to the LORD’s Discipline

Naomi shows that the LORD has severely disciplined her. We read in verse 13, “Nay, my daughters, for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me” (1:13). What does she say? The LORD has disciplined and punished me. Even more, “it grieveth me.” In the original it has the meaning of bitterness. It comes from the Hebrew word “mar.” That is why Naomi later says, “Call me not Naomi, call me *Mara*: for the Almighty hath dealt very *bitterly* with me.” (Ruth 1:20). It is related to a bitter cry and mourning. In Zechariah, it says, “And they shall mourn for [Christ pierced], as one mourneth for his only son, And *shall be in bitterness* for him, as one that is in *bitterness* for his firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). Do you see what happens? Naomi shows Ruth that the LORD is hard. But what does grieve Naomi? She says, “for your sakes.” No, it is not for herself but for her daughters-in-law. She found fault with herself. She believes that the judgment God in her life is just. She says, “The hand of the LORD is gone out against me.” Maybe you ask, “What is ‘hand of the LORD’? Has God body-parts?” No. It is an expression of God’s power. This can be positive and negative. Positively, it shows deliverance. Think of Israel that was delivered out of Egypt. Other times it is related to the gospel preaching. Isaiah says, “Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” (Isa. 53:1). It can also be negatively, to destroy when someone does not keep God’s commandments (1 Sam. 12:15). In our text, it is certainly the latter. God has judged her. Do we remember, congregation, who hear this of Naomi? It is “my daughters.” Yes, Ruth hears all this. Not only that there is no future. Also, that God is against Naomi. Does it not show that Ruth’s heart is deeply tested? What does she think of God’s discipline? What if God is against Naomi? Will she then go with her? Do we see? What hope is here for Ruth? Nothing. Even the LORD, the covenant God, is against them. What will Ruth do? Will she return to Moab? About that we will hear later.

Application

Believers, do you not know about that period life that the hand of the LORD was against me? Can testify of it? That is a time in my life when the Bible spoke against me. What was the result? Very much like Naomi, grief and bitterness. Yes, grief about my own sin. But more. What is it? Zechariah said, to be “in bitterness for Him,” that is “Me whom they have pierced.” This refers to Christ. What did you see then? My sin are like that crown of thorns. My sin caused His blood to drip from His head, hands, and feet. Ah, if I see that, how can I then be silent? Then I must be in bitterness for Him. It was because of me! Not someone else was the problem! No, I crucified Him by my sin. What was the result of this crucifixion? That He was crushed! Why? Because God’s mighty hand was against Him. Yes, the LORD testified against Him. He saw Christ as sinner. This Savior had to pay the infinite price. It is true, Naomi remained alive. But what about Christ? Finally, He breathed His last breath. Then He died. Why? Because I, sinner, deserved it. He took my place. And that for such a one! Child if the LORD, if that is the case, then you know also of another time. Because the LORD testified against Christ, you could be spoken free! Free! What a wonder! Who ever thought that this would be true? Yes, the LORD still disciplines His children. But that is only to teach them or to correct them for their sin.

Or are we unknown with all this? Friend, then it can be said of you, “Who believed our report? To whom the arm of the LORD revealed?” (Isa. 53:1). You never saw any comeliness in Christ. He was despised, yes, by you! You hide your face from Him. Ah, do not remain that way. It will testify against you! What does the Bible say? “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth *no more sacrifice* for sins” (Hebr. 10:26). Do you hear that sinner? Then there will be no more sacrifice. Dear friend, then it is too late! Why? Because you despised that precious blood. Ah, turn then from your sin. It will never give true pleasure. Only when you see the blood of Christ, you will experience true joy. But let us now return to our text. Ruth hears Naomi. What is her decision? Does she return? No. Her heart is revealed. Our second thought.

II. Ruth’s Heart Revealed

The heart of Ruth is revealed in four things, first, in her deed, second, in her plea, third, in her confession, and fourth, in her oath.

In Her Deed — Cleaving

The deed of Ruth is visible in cleaving to her mother-in-law. We read in verse 14, “Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.” What a difference do we see here. One will sadly return (1:15), but the other will remain steadfast. We read that she “clave.” That means, she clings and is attached to her mother. She shows her loyalty, affection, and faithfulness. Let us give an example. Let’s say that you want to hang something on the wall. Without glue, it falls down. But when you use strong glue, it sticks to the wall. It remains there. Well, this is true for Ruth. Even more, the verb shows that her action is already finished. She had made up her mind already before. She is unwilling to change. But how strong is this cleaving? It is a very strong word. At times, the Bible uses it for marriage, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and *shall cleave* unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Other times, it is used to cling to the LORD, “Take diligent heed...to love the LORD your God...and to keep his commandments, and *to cleave unto* him, and to serve him with all your heart” (Josh. 22:5). This is what Ruth does. She clings fully to her mother-in-law. We read, “Ruth clave.” The original shows an emphasis on her. *She* clave, *she* clung to Naomi. What a contrast with Orpah. Orpah returned, *but Ruth* cleaves. Later we read that she “cleaves” or “keeps fast” with Boaz’ maiden and young men (Ruth 2:8, 21, 23). That is the same word.

Application

What happens when the LORD testifies against you? Will you then return to world? Some do. But that is only a common conviction. It is like Orpah. It became too difficult her. She still clung her people and her gods. This is also true for those who are not truly convicted. Then the world draws. What when is a saving conviction? In the case like Ruth? Then they cleave even more to LORD at trials. But to whom do they cleave ultimately? Jesus Christ. Then they can say, “LORD, whatever thou testify against me, I cannot live without thee!” With Peter, they confess, “To whom shall [I] go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). No, then they cannot find their life anywhere else. Why not? Love is poured out in their heart and that draws. No, not that they know that is from God. But it is true what Jeremiah said, “I [the LORD] have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with *lovingkindness* have I *drawn* thee” (Jer. 31:3). The LORD draws them. That is why they cling to Him. Hearer, does this describe your heart? Do you know about this drawing love?

Unconverted listener, is it not true? You cling to the things world, and to things of this life? That draws you. Some want to have a family, listen to music, or desire alcohol. They cannot live without. But may we ask, does it give you true joy? Why do you cling to it? It brings death. Maybe you think, that is nonsense. But we can assure you! Think about this. If you were very sick at this moment, would care those things mentioned before? No. Then you care about one thing, your life. Why would you then not care about eternity? Ask God’s people, tell me more about that true life. Ah, kiss world farewell. Return unto the LORD. Be a Ruth and not an Orpah. Look at their end. But what other things does Ruth? She pleads with Naomi.

In Her Plea — No Entreating

In verse 15, Naomi tries a final time to ask Ruth to go back, “Thy sister in law is gone back...return after [her].” Notice that she does not say, “my daughter-in-law,” or “Orpah,” but “*thy* sister-in-law.” What does Ruth answer? Does she return? No. She gives a plea to her mother-in-law. It says in verse 16, “Ruth said, intreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee.” Yes, it begins with, “intreat me not.” That means, do not urge me so strongly. Do not put pressure upon me. Literally it says, do not strike upon me or meet me. That is used at times for attacking someone. In our verse, it is a negative command, it “expresses a strong desire or wish that something will not happen.” But is Ruth not rude? No. For her, it is enough. It is the same when Jesus Christ said to John the Baptist, “Allow me to baptize” (Matt. 3:15). The same is true when parents urge a child to do wrong things. Then the child is allowed to say, “No dad.” But what does Ruth not want? It says, “to leave thee.” That means to leave her behind or to forsake Naomi. Also, this word is marriage related, “Therefore shall a man *leave* his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen. 2:24). Later Boaz says to Ruth, “Thou *hast left* thy father and mother” (Ruth 2:11). At times, it is even used when someone forsakes the LORD, “If ye *forsake* the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good” (Josh. 24:20). But forsaking in what? “To return from following after thee.” That is to change her mind, to return, or to repent. Yes, it was used in the verses 11 and 12 for “to turn again,” and for Orpah who is “gone back.” Here, we may say that Ruth answers her, “I convinced in my heart to follow thee.” Yes, her sister-in-law had followed after her gods, but Ruth desires to follow after the true God.

Application

Congregation, let’s say that someone else, for example your employer, ask you, I want you to do this. But you know it is against God’s commandment. What will answer? Are you going to say, “I cannot, because I can only follow God’s commandment”? Or would you do it? That is sin. No, the LORD can even bless you outwardly if you keep His commandments. Or another thing, how would we respond if someone else speaks bad of God? Would we defend Him? Yes, that can be a great time of confessing who we truly are. Naomi knew Ruth’s heart only when she pressed her. The same can be true for us. We can be a hidden Christian at our work. But at such trying times, we are pressed forward to confess. What does Ruth now do? She gives a confession of her heart. What is it?

In Her Confession — God is my God

She says, “For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:16-17). The Targum makes it even more challenging. For example, Naomi says there, “You are not allowed to worship any other gods.” Ruth would have answered, “Thy God is my God.” In our verses we see a certain structure. There are six things mentioned. The first two are about life and activity: going, and lodging. The next two are about relationship: to God’s people, and to God Himself. The last two are about death: dying, and burial.

In the first place, we see a confession *for life*. We read, “whither thou goest, I will go.” This going can be seen in two different ways. On the one hand it points to a regular going. For example, “They [Terah and sons] *went forth*...to go into the land of Canaan.” (Gen. 11:31). On the other hand, it can have a spiritual meaning. It speaks about spiritual life, “Enoch *walked* [literally: went] with God (Gen. 5:22). But if we look to our passage, how can Ruth say this? Naomi just returned from her wrong choice. Did Ruth see the spiritual reality in Naomi? Certainly, she knew that Naomi planned to return to the LORD. That was the desire of Ruth’s heart as well. Can she then walk spiritually after her? But more, next we read, “where thou lodgest, I will lodge.” To lodge means to pass the night. Figuratively, it points to abide with someone. It could be for a night or a short time. Think of Balaam, “*Lodge here this night*” (Num. 22:8). It can also point to a longer period of time, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High: *Shall abide* under the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps. 91:1). The latter is applicable for Ruth. She wants to abide with Naomi. These first two sentences can even be external. But this is not the case for the next two phrases. They are relational and personal.

In the second place, we see a confession in relation *to God and His people*. We read, “thy people shall be my people.” Who are those people? The Moabites? No. The people of Israel. What was Israel? First, they had external covenant privileges. They were the chosen people (Deut. 7:7). They had the Word God and circumcision (Rom. 3:1-2). Second, they have at this moment received God’s blessing. The LORD had visited His people (Ruth 1:6). Third, it was an unknown people for Ruth. She knew them not before (Ruth 2:11). But how could Ruth then say “my people”? Well, she desires to dwell among them. She longs to live according to their laws and customs. No, not only an externally keeping, but it is her heart’s desire. Oh yes, Israel was also an afflicted people (Ex. 3:7). They knew about strife (Judg. 14:3). Other nations tried to destroy them (Ester 7:4). Sadly, they were also a disobeying people (Ps. 81:13). And still, it was a people belonging to the LORD (Lev. 26:12). The LORD had spoken that He would never forsake them (1 Kings 6:13). This is ultimately the main reason for Ruth. It was her to do about God. That is why she said, “thy God my God.” In the original we miss the verb “is.” But that is implied here. So, we should read, “thy God is my God.” This is the main element of her confession. It is about God. It means that she forsakes the idols Moab. But which God does Ruth speak about? Is it Chemosh? Absolutely not. No, Orpah went back to her gods. Yes, there the same word for “god” is used. But here it is about the LORD (1:6, 1:17). It is about the LORD God of Israel (2:12). Who is this God? He is “merciful, and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). Yes, a God that forgives iniquity and transgression (Ex. 34:7). But how is Ruth related to this God? How can it be so personal, “my God”? Then she knew about His mercy, His grace, and His long-suffering. She had experienced His goodness and truth. Yes, even more, she knew personally that this God forgave her iniquity and transgressions. That is why she could say, “my God.” It became very personal. What a wonder if you know that she was a heathen, a gentile. Yes, this is only about Gods mercy.

In the third place, we see her confession about *death and the last place of rest*. We read, “where thou diest, will I die. There will I be buried.” It speaks of the last part of life. Also, it points to eternity after this life. No, she not only desires to live with God’s people but also to die with them. Why? Most likely she knew this reality herself. She, therefore, speaks about being “buried” with Naomi. Why is it important that this is mentioned? Burial was an important matter in Israel. Jacob said to his sons, “I am to be

gathered unto my people: *bury* me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite” (Gen. 49:29). He wanted to be buried in Canaan. To be placed beside his forefathers. Yes, congregation, burning of bones was seen as God’s displeasure. For example, king Saul was burned, “[They] took the *body of Saul* and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and *burnt them* there” (1 Sam. 31:12). What about Ruth? She desires to be buried in Canaan. The land of promise. Why? This would be place of her resurrection. That was important for her.

Application

Friends, do we know about the following spiritually? Jesus Christ said, “Follow me.” By nature, we are unwilling. And even after grace, it can often be such a challenge. Think about Peter. He wanted to follow Christ. But he fled when Jesus was captured. Yes, even that same night he denied Him. Yes, the true Church follows Christ in His footsteps. What does that mean? They will go through difficulties, valleys of tears, persecution, and even death. No, this is not a payment for sin. That only happened by Jesus Christ. But the Bible says when they are crucified with Christ, they will also be raised with Him. Thus, it cannot be that there is no crucifixion. Ah, it is painful when our flesh is crucified. We love our flesh. But, it is so releasing and reviving when the old man dies. Why? Because then one will also be raised with Jesus Christ. Then the new man will arise. Unconverted friend, Jesus says: “Follow Me!” Not, not the world or self. But me!

Believer, the text speaks about “lodging.” Do you know about the LORD lodging in your heart? What do we mean? To experience His shadow. Then He came in that dark and dirty heart What did He do? First, He began to cleanse it. All that dust was taken out. That took time. What a mess was found there! But how was it cleansed? By the blood of Christ. What did then happen? The LORD lodged. That means there is communion and closeness. And spiritually, you then felt the closeness of the LORD. He became so precious. Then you felt such a deep communion. How is that possible? God was angry? Yes. But now you saw His shining face. And the result is communion with the people of God also.

Congregation, do we know about the communion with God’s people? Ruth said, “Thy people shall be my people.” Can you say that? The unconverted cannot. No, they do not like it to be pointed to their sin. They hate it that God’s people weep and are sorrowful. Another question, do hate others? Is there strife and contention? Then the Bible makes clear that you are not converted. John writes, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (1 John 2:9). Do you realize that? Ah, but God’s true people know about this communion with God’s people! What do they then feel? When another child of God speaks, then they feel life. It draws. Is it not true? Then time flies. May I say it this way? Believer, such moments are a little foretaste of heaven. In that place will always be communion. No, not only with God, but also with His dear people and all the sinless angels.

Congregation, can you truly say, “Thy God my God?” How did get to know Him? Do you say, I have grown up this way. I have believed that this is true. Friend, then we have to be honest. The Bible says, we are born in sin! God is by nature not our Father. If you do not know about a change, you are not converted. Then you are still in your sins! Seek the LORD. Then, He is truly your God. Because what do God’s people learn? Who God is. Yes, in His holiness and righteousness. Certainly. But also in His goodness, long-suffering, kindness and mercy. Ah, if you realize that, then it humbles you in dust. Do we know of that, congregation? Oh, yes, the devil puffs up! He makes ‘good’ Christians. But God humbles! He makes ‘bad’ Christians. That means, to abhor yourself and to exalt God. And at the end, when death comes, can we than honestly say, where God’s people die, I will die also?

People of God, there comes a moment that your body may finally lay in the grave. Then it will be an everlasting rest for you. You ask, a rest from what? Your sinful body and your wicked heart. Then you will always be with the LORD. Forever with Christ. Finally, your renewed body will be resurrected. Is that your longing, friend?

My unconverted fellow, for you, it will be totally different. The moment of the resurrection will be one of everlasting contempt! Never any more rest. A horrifying sight. And that for always. But, friend, you have not yet died. Turn unto the LORD. Ask, “LORD, I need to know the true God. Wilt thou change my heart?” We can assure you, if you truly pray from the heart, God will hear. He is willing to be your God. But when it comes to Ruth’s confession, what does she do after that? She gives her oath. What oath?

In Her Oath

We read in verse 17, “The LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” Literally, it says, “Thus the LORD do to me, and thus He shall add... if...” This is a Hebrew way of pronouncing an oath. Keil and Delitzsch write, “Thus he will do...and add...are frequently recurring formula in connection with an oath” (2 Sam. 3:17). Now, you ask, what is an oath? We can define it as, to call on God as witness for the truthfulness of a statement. Why? Because God knows everything. He is able to punish me if I do not keep it. An example of an oath is found in the courtroom. Then you might be asked, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?” Then you give an oath by your answer yes. In case it will not keep it, like with Ruth, what will the result be? Then God may severely punish you. Yes, Ruth swears, if I depart, the LORD may punish me. Her desire is clearly shown. She wants to remain with Naomi forever.

Conclusion

Congregation, we have heard that Ruth’s heart was tried and how she confessed the LORD. We saw that she did not desire earthly welfare. No. Neither was she afraid of the LORD’s discipline. Her heart was revealed in word and deed. She cleaved, pleaded, confessed and swore. If we compare this to our heart, can say same? Do we recognize ourselves in Ruth? Or, if we are honest, must we say, No? I miss this. May we then ask, why? Are you drawn to the world? Do you have anxiety for God? Friend, it is far better to have the LORD than to gain all world. Seek Him. Then you will experience God’s mercy and love as well. What a blessing that is. People of God, keep your eyes on God. He has been merciful and gracious so far. He will remain it until your death. Then may see Him face to face forever. Amen.