

A Difficult Moment at the Border of Moab

Preached in New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church, Middleville, MI, on Sunday morning, February 27, 2022 by C. VanSteenselen.

Text: Ruth 1:8-10

Psalter 254:4-5

Psalter 60:1,3,7

Psalter 385:1,3

Psalter 196

Congregation,

Have you ever said farewell? Maybe when a family member went to other country. What happens then? Many tears flow. You exchange your last kisses. You wish the person all the best. Yes, God’s speed. It is difficult to let him go. It is such a challenge. You will miss him for a long time. Will you ever see him back? Or saying farewell happened at the deathbed of your husband. You sat next to him and spoke a few words. You saw he was dying. Then his last breath. All was over. At that very moment tears came. You felt love. You realized, I will miss him forever. He will never come back.

What would it have been for Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth at the border of Israel? Naomi said farewell. She blessed them in the name of the LORD. They kissed each other and wept. Would they ever see each other back? This difficult moment is the theme for the sermon.

Theme: A Difficult Moment at the Border of Moab

I. A Return Commanded

II. A Blessing Pronounced

III. A Farewell Prepared

I. A Return Commanded

Who are Commanded

The first question we like to consider is, who commands and who are commanded? Verse 8 says, “And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law.” Again, we see the name Naomi. The last time we read her name was in verse 3, “Naomi’s husband died” (1:3). In the following verses, we read “woman” (1:5), and “she” (1:6-7). Now we see

her name again. But why? Do you remember what her name means? It is “pleasant one.” That is also shown in the conversation. She sincerely cares for their future. We see this in the two blessings she gives to her daughters-in-law. It shows indeed that they are “her daughters-in-law.” She finally says, “The LORD deal kindly....as ye have dealt with me.” But when we think about these “two daughters in law,” who are they? Orpah and Ruth. Let’s first consider the term daughters-in-law. What does it mean? In the Bible, it is translated in different ways. The first possibility is “bride.” This happens mainly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Joel. We read in Isaiah, “A *bride* adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10). Second, it can be translated as “spouse.” This is seen in Song of Solomon and Hosea. For example, “How fair is thy love, my sister, my *spouse!*” (Song 4:10). A third translation is “daughter-in-law.” This is found in the books Genesis - 1 Chronicles, Ezekiel, and Micah. One example is Sarai, who is called daughter-in-law (Gen. 11:31). This is also the translation we look for in our passage. But how often do we see this term in Ruth? Seven times. That is the number of fullness. Two daughters-in-law. But did Naomi feel the difference in the religion of Orpah and Ruth?

Application

As we saw, our passage uses the name Naomi, “the pleasant one.” She speaks to her daughters-in-law and these brides. In the same way, Jesus Christ is the “Pleasant One,” and the “Beloved Son of the Father.” Yes, He speaks to His bride. Why? He has a good relationship with her. Is that because of her? No. She is sinful. It is only the case because of Him. He cares for her, both personally and for her eternal future. He sees His bride as “fair” and “His love.” Why? Because He bought her with Himself. He paid a high price. He had to give His own life. He went for her into death. In our passage, Naomi spoke blessings, but was unable to give it to her daughters-in-law. But Jesus Christ not only speaks a blessing to the church but also gives it to her.

The text shows us another lesson. Orpah and Ruth were widows. In the same way, the true church has become a widow. Her husband died. The law. Why? That she would marry another husband, Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:4). And now, He adorns this church with spiritual jewels. Which ones, you ask? Grace, righteousness and sanctification.

Further, Naomi gave commandments to those related to her. In the same way, Jesus Christ gives commandments. He says to strugglers in our midst, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). To sinners He

says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22). And He commands believers, “Abide in me.... He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:4-5). Let’s turn back to our passage. What did Naomi command to Orpah and Ruth?

What is Commanded

Naomi’s command is found in verse 8, “Go, return each to her mother’s house” (1:8). The commandment means to go or to walk. It is the same what God told Abraham, “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, *Get thee out* [literally: go] of thy country....unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1). It is also the same word as in verse 1, “and the man went,” and verse 7, “and they went.” Yes, Naomi uses a command. She urges her relatives to immediate action (Choi). What do they have to do? The text says “to return.” It is similar as verse 6, “she returned from Moab,” and verse 7, “on the way to return.” In our verse, it has the idea of going back to Moab. They had to change their mind to not come to Israel. They should return to their own gods. Yes, this word for going is sometimes used for going after false gods. For example, “It came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel *turned again*, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god” (Judg. 8:33). In our verse you may interpret it as returning to their own country, family, people, and gods. Again, it is a command and immediate action is needed. But where exactly do they have to go? It says, “each to her mother’s house.” Why their mother’s and not their father’s house? The annotations on the Dutch Bible say, “Either because the father Orpah had died, or because mothers cherish their daughters most. Of Ruth is said that she left her father (2:11).” The phrase “mother’s house” is also used in the Song of Solomon, “I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into *my mother’s house*, and into the chamber of her that conceived me” (Song. 3:4). There, the bride speaks. It shows that there is love between the two. Yes, both women had to return to their house. And not surprising, we find this word seven times in Ruth.

Application

Uninterested friend in our midst, God commands you: go, turn from your sin and from the world. It is urgent! Do not wait. Then it could be too late. God asks obedience. Please, listen to His authority. It is not a choice if. But now.

My convicted listener, Jesus Christ calls: Come, turn. You say, where do I need to turn to? No, not to the mother’s house, but to the house of the Father. That is, the house of

God. You ask, how? That can only be by fleeing to Jesus Christ. Friend, to have conviction of sin is great. But never forget, it needs to bring you to Jesus Christ. Ah. It is true, the devil also speaks to you. He says, “Go, turn back to the world. God does not hear. You had it so good by me. Why would you desire trouble? I ‘care’ for you. Do you want job loss? Do you like to be ridiculed? Do you desire persecution? No? Then listen to me.” But, friend, he is the father of lies. If you listen, you will end with the world and with sinners. Then you are like Israel. They turned back to idols. Ah friend, let not be the case.

Child of God, God sometimes puts his children to the test. Then He says, “Go back to your ‘former life’ and the ‘place of your youth.’” Why would God do this? It is to test reality of your conversion. You ask, is that Biblical? Yes, think about the disciples. Jesus asked them, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:67). Ah, and then you hear their heart. They are truly converted and say, “Lord we cannot. That is the way of death. Thou hast life. We need that.” It is true. Jesus Christ is also honest. He says that they will have persecution if they follow in His footsteps. They need to deny themselves. Friend, if it is well, you can say, “LORD, I cannot do different. Do what thou pleasest.” In that way, you will receive a blessing from the LORD. In our text Naomi pronounced two blessings upon her two daughters-in-law. This is our second thought.

II. A Blessing Pronounced

The LORD’s Loving-kindness

Naomi does not give the women one blessing but two. First, she wishes them God’s loving-kindness. Verse 8 says, “The LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.” This verse does not say God but LORD with four capitals. That is in our King James Bible the translation for Yahweh. This name is used both here in verse 8, “the LORD deal kindly,” and verse 9, “The LORD grant.” You probably ask, who is Yahweh? It is the covenant name of God. It means that He is unique and exists by Himself. Summarized, Yahweh means “the name of a self-existing and covenant God.” Why is this name used? Is it because Naomi had seen God’s covenant goodness in Israel? Is it because Naomi knew that they cannot live without the LORD, even in Moab? We are not sure. What does she say more? The LORD “deal kindly” with you. This word for “deal” expresses a benediction. Naomi as it were pronounces God’s blessing upon her daughters. We find the same expression in Numbers, “The LORD *ble*ss thee and keep thee.” (Num. 6:24). How

should the LORD deal with them? The text says “kindly.” In the original it says “chesed.” That is a very deep and broad word. It has many meanings. Actually, it is an essential part of God’s character! This is what the LORD says about Himself to Moses, “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and *abundant in goodness and truth*” (Ex. 34:6). We could define this word as, “God’s covenant ‘faithfulness, kindness, [and] grace’ towards man ‘in doing favors and benefits.’” We find it also in the fourth commandment, “And *showing mercy* unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:6). This is the wish of Naomi. She desires God’s covenant mercy and goodness upon Orpah and Ruth. But why? She says, “ye have dealt with the dead and with me.” The word for “dead” is in the plural. It refers to both Mahlon and Chilion, when they were alive. Matthew Henry says that they were good wives and daughters-in-law. It shows that there was a good relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law.

Application

Believer, do you know God as LORD? What do we mean? First, that He is *Self-Existing*. How important is that in the life of a believer? Then you have a dependent life on Him. Also in all things spiritual. Then you also glorify Him because He is independent. He needs nothing. He has life in Himself. Ah, humble yourself then before Him. You are in utter need. He is willing to give. What? All spiritual graces. What a blessing that is. Second, that you have learned about His covenant faithfulness. He has promised salvation and He gave it freely. He told about the righteous in Jesus Christ, and He applied it. He said, I will preserve and sustain you, and He has done it until now. He has taught, I am your Father. Ah, when you sinned, He hid his face. But after confession, you were allowed to see His glorious face again. Third, that He gives kindness. Child of God, have you seen that this belongs to His essence? He cannot but be good. Ah, yes, in the first period of your life, you saw that you were in your sin and misery. That was the way unto salvation. But then also time and again, He bestowed His kindness upon you. Yes, and that for one undeserved.

Another lesson is that the women in our passage have dealt very kindly with the dead. May we ask you, congregation, how do you deal with those that are spiritually dead? With unbelievers? Is it with love or harsh? Naomi spoke to these women. She encouraged them. How do we speak to them? Do we encourage them? Do we speak of the LORD? Yes, such moments can be impressed on that person 25 years later! Even when he or she is unconverted. If there is love in it, they will taste it.

Unregenerate listener, do you know some Ruth's in your life? What do we mean? Those that feel love for you. And still, you want live sin. You are unwilling to be converted. You feel: they have something that I do not have. Sometimes it makes you jealous. But you keep continuing in sin. May we ask further, do you know some Naomi's? Those that speak of the LORD. Those that bless you when you hurt them. We may say to you, sinner, God is still merciful. He still looks down upon a poor sinner like you. He says, “Poor sinner, come to me. I know if you will not do that, you will perish. I want to give you life, eternal life. How? By my beloved Son, Jesus Christ. I dealt harsh with Him. He died. Why? So that you could have life.” Pray then, friend, that you may see the mercy of the LORD. Then you will also know God's rest and peace. This is what we see also in our passage. Naomi desires rest for Orpah and Ruth.

The LORD's Rest

What kind of rest does Naomi desire? Well, the LORD's rest. We read in verse 9, “The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.” It is true that the LORD needs to grant or give it. Again, this is a benediction or blessing upon them. Matthew Henry calls it a parting prayer. Yes, Naomi says, that “ye may find rest [or a resting place.]” What rest is meant here? At times, rest points to God's abode (Isa. 66:1), or a psychological rest (calm). Think of Psalm 95, “Unto whom I swear in my wrath: That they should not enter into my *rest*” (Ps. 95:11). That is the place where God dwells, heaven. This seems not to be the case in our verse. Jamieson says that she wants them to have a quiet life. A life without cares and troubles, that were true after widowhood. This is the meaning here. We read that also in chapter 3, where Naomi says to Ruth, “My daughter, shall I not seek *rest* for thee, that it may be well with thee?” (Ruth 3:1). There, she points to have Boaz as redeemer and future husband. Yes, in our verse it is a promise. She wants this to happen in the future, but Naomi has not the power to fulfill it. What kind of rest then? We read, “each of you in the house of her husband.” In other words, Naomi wants that they will be married again. Matthew Henry says, “Paul gives [this] advice also that the elderly women say to the younger women that they marry.” Another commentator writes, “Naomi thought that none in Bethlehem would be interested to marry Moabite women. Neither had she the possibility of herself.” At the same time, we have to say that it is problematic advice. The Geneva Bible Notes mention, “It appears that Naomi by dwelling among idolaters ‘was’ waxed cold in the true zeal of God, she has rather

respect to the case of the body then the comfort of the soul.” In other words, Naomi cares much more for their marriage and bodily welfare than for their spiritual welfare.

Application

Let's draw a few lines. Have we received blessings of the LORD? What blessing? The true rest. What do we mean? All as we are born have an unrest in our heart. When we do wrong, it gives more unrest. Unbeliever, have you noticed that? In external matters, unrest can come because of a lack sleep, or being worried about your children or your company. This can even be true for the believer. It is hard, sometimes even impossible, to trust God all things. At the same time, we may say that God gives true rest to His people. This is peace in their heart and peace with God. Then there is no longer a spiritual unrest about their future. No, this does not mean that this is not under attack. But the LORD gives this blessing to His people. How? In the house of their “husband” Jesus Christ. He desires that marriage between a sinful bride and a sinless Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

Another question, are you married to Jesus Christ? If you are in truth, what a peace and what a joy. Yes, on earth Gods people still have war. But at times, they may enjoy moments of rest. But what are they heading to? The rest of God. This is what the Hebrews speak about. What is it? Heaven. There, they will no longer have to fight the devil, the world and themselves. There, they may enjoy an eternal rest. It will specially be joy after they became so wearied. For them there will no longer be tears nor pain. No, only to give eternal glory to God.

Congregation, how do we pray for one another? Do we pray for the preachers, ministers, and students? Do we pray for our enemies? Do we pray for our neighbors' eternal welfare?

A word to those in our midst that are restless. Where do you seek rest? Do you try to find it in the world? Do you seek it in vacation? Do you try to work hard? Do you try to be a good father? Or do you seek it in the Word? Do you search for it in Christ? That is what we urge you to do. God's promise is, “Come to me all ye that labor, and I shall give you rest.” Yes, Jesus Christ said it. Then, you will truly find rest in Him. Then, you are forever at peace with the Father. In our passage, what will happen after Naomi's blessing? They prepare for a farewell, our third thought.

III. A Farewell Prepared

A Challenging Farewell

It is not easy for Naomi to say farewell to her daughters-in-law. Neither is it without challenge for these daughters. We read in verse 9, “Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.” Who is the one that kisses? That is Naomi, not her daughters-in-law. But why would they kiss? In Biblical times there were two for this. The first is to greet one another, the second to say farewell. Let’s look at the first one, the greeting. One example is when Jacob meets Rachel for the first time. The Bible says, “Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept” (Gen. 29:11). That was a hearty meeting. Another example is in the New Testament when Judas kisses his Master. No, not to be kind but to deliver Him (Mark 14:45). The second possibility when people kissed was to say farewell. One example we find in the Old Testament with Laban. He want to say farewell to his children. We read, “Early in the morning Laban rose up, and *kissed* his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban *departed*, and returned unto his place” (Gen. 31:55). Also, later in Ruth, we read that “Orpah kissed mother in law” (1:14). After that she returned (1:15). Jamieson says, “[Kissing is an] oriental (eastern) manner when friends are parting.” In our verse it points to a farewell kiss. We do the same when we say goodbye if a family member emigrates. But after this, what happened? We read, “they lifted up their voice, and wept” (1:9). What does it mean to lift up your voice? We have a similar expression, “He raised his voice.” That means, he cries out with a loud voice. In our verse, it is to cry out of sorrow. An audible weeping. This is confirmed by the word “and wept.” Weeping can be a sign of true sorrow. For instance, we read about Job’s friend, “[They] *lifted up* their voice, and *wept*; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven” (Job 2:12). They saw the pain and sorrow Job had. And they sorrowed with him. Also, in a spiritual manner, weeping can be a sign of true sorrow. We read of Peter, “Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and *wept* bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). He realized what he had done, and that caused him to weep. No, not only in an outward manner, but a deep sorrow in his heart. Maybe good to give an example. Maybe we have stood at someone’s deathbed or graveside. All standing there wept. Why? Because it was a solemn moment of farewell. The same is true for our passage.

Application

In our passage we read that the three women kissed one another. A kiss of farewell. May we ask, did you kiss spiritually already? What do we mean? Kissing the Son of God. Why? Psalm 2 says, “Lest He be angry.” Or have we tried to deceitfully kiss God? Like a Judas. You want to be God’s ‘friend’ but at the same time that of the world. No, true kissing will never begin with man. We saw in our passage that Naomi began. Spiritually, it is God who begins, not man.

Another lesson we can draw, did we kiss already farewell? To say farewell to our worldly friends? To say goodbye to sin? Then there is indeed a lifting up of our voice and bitter weeping. Yes, with our voice we will complain about ourselves. We will ask forgiveness. With our tears we will weep. In the first place about our own heart. But also about God’s goodness and because we cannot miss God.

People of God, when you are further led, then God will sometimes try to say ‘farewell.’ Then you are spiritually deserted. At such moments, it can be so dark. Spurgeon said about such moments, “Then you look into the darkness, you see it, but you are unable to change.” Oh yes, then you can become so indifferent. No more desire to run after God, to read the Bible, or to pray. But God never leaves! Oh, no. He preserves. Others have a similar situation but realize that they miss God. They long to see His face. If that is the case, pray then that the LORD may restore your joy. Congregation, do you know about such further leadings? Why would God do that? For three different reasons. First, to show your utter dependence on Him. All things for your salvation must come from Him. Second, that you would be more careful with sin, if that was the cause. Third, to make you dependent on God’s Word and not on your feelings or emotions. Let us now return to our text. What are Orpah and Ruth going to do? Will they obey? No. They refuse to say farewell.

A Refusal to Farewell

Verse 10 says, “And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.” After weeping, Naomi’s daughters-in-law begin to speak. What will they say? “Mother, this is good. We will return.”? No, they refuse to go. They say, “Surely, we will return.” The word “surely” is an interesting one in the original. It has different meanings. Sometimes, it gives a reason, “for or because.” For example, we see in verse 6, “Then she arose...for she had heard.” But this is not the case here. There is no previous sentence. Other times, when this word stands alone, it is to emphasize. Then

we may translate it with, “yes, indeed, truly, surely, and certainly.” That is the case here. They give her a positive assurance to go with her. In English, we do the same. If someone asks, “Will you do that?” You can answer, “Of course, I will do that.” Another example is what the LORD says to Joshua, “The LORD said unto him, *Surely* I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (Judg. 6:16). God assures that Joshua will have the victory. The same happens with Orpah and Ruth. They confirm that they will return with her. Sadly, we see later that Orpah said it only out of politeness or custom. In some cultures, like that Latin America, this is often the case. If you ask, “Do you want more food?” They will say, “No.” This is out of custom, to show politeness. If you would directly say yes, you greedy. What do these daughters then say? “We will return with thee.” In the original there is an emphasis on “with thee.” So, we can translate, “*With thee*, we will return.” But where will they return? It is “unto thy people.” Thus, the people of Israel. The LORD’s people. Yes, the LORD had given ‘his people’ bread (1:6). Notice that the emphasis is on Naomi’s people and not on the people of Orpah or Ruth. But what do we not hear? “And unto thy God.” Oh yes, this is in Ruth’s heart, “thy God shall be my God” (1:16). Certainly, this people is unknown to Ruth. We hear that later when Boaz says to Ruth, “[Thou] art come unto a *people* which thou *knewest not* heretofore” (Ruth 2:11). But still she desires to go there.

Application

Unbeliever, why will you not “surely return with God’s people”? Yes, that means also a return to God. That is the best what can happen to a person. Surely, God is worth it. Because what happened Ruth? She truly sought God. She came to Israel. Even more, she became mother. Even the mother of Jesus Christ. If you seek God in truth, you will find Him. Then you can say, God “is my God.” What will you then have? More than world give. Then you have all! Ask a child God, “Will ever go back?” If he is in the right place, he will say, “Never. I have it much better than before, even though I have many afflictions.” That will be your part if you truly seek and receive it. Then you will obtain an unspeakable joy.

Conclusion

Congregation, we all are at a border. The border between life and death, time and eternity. We do not know how far we are. Think about 9/11. Imagine that you are present in one of those towers. You are at floor 100. Suddenly, you hear a loud explosion. You hear screaming. A few minutes later another explosion takes place.

“A Difficult Moment at the Border of Moab” by C. VanSteenselen

Now you see that the other tower is on fire. You notice that even your own tower is full of smoke. You try to run downstairs but realize, the whole tower is on fire. There is no chance to escape. You call mother and say, “Help! The tower is on fire. I cannot escape!” Mother is shocked. You say, “I love you mom. I have to hang up. Bye mother.” These are your last words. The fire is already in your room. One breath, and you die. You have to appear before God. If this is you, how would stand before Him? Amen.