

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Faith of Ruth

Ruth 1:15-18

1:15 And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

1:17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

1:18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

There are two books called by the name of women in sixty-six books of the Bible. One is the book of Ester, and the other is the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth and of Ester were written in totally different times and have much different story. But both of them describe the faith, obedience, and courage of women. The Bible talks about men of faith such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, and Kaleb. It also tells us about many women of faith at the same time. In ancient times, women were not respected, but the Bible praises the faith of women and the women of faith. There are no men and women in the world of faith. The Bible teaches that true believers, men or women, are equally accepted by God and please God by their faith. They can influence others and the society. Today, we are going to learn about

the faith of Ruth, but I'd like to start from Naomi who witnessed to Ruth for God. Because Naomi led Ruth to the faith.

1. Naomi's Witnessing

Naomi lived with Elimelech, her husband, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, in Bethlehem. The whole family went to sojourn in the country of Moab because of a famine in Israel. And, the husband died in the land of Moab. But, she lived there even after the husband passed away. Ruth 1:4 says, "They lived there about ten years." In ten years, the sons grew up and took their wives; the name of the one was Orpah and of the other Ruth. Naomi became a mother-in-law of Orpah and Ruth.

We use a *kanji*, which means "old woman" for showing "mother-in-law" in Japanese. It's very rude for women. But this *kanji* tells that the troubles are very common between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Orpah and Ruth were women of foreign country for Naomi. There were language and cultural barrier. It was no wonder that any troubles happened. It was very hard to treat two daughters-in-law equally. Though she tried to do so, she might treat one gentle, but others harsh. Two daughters-in-law might become competitive for seeking their mother-in-laws' attention. There are many accounts of troubles among families and relatives in the Bible. However, we don't see any family problems in the book of Ruth. Both of Orpah and Ruth really loved Naomi. Naomi and her daughters-in-law had good relationship. They enjoyed happy family life. When we read such beautiful stories of relationship in the Bible, we enjoy them. And when we know that faith is the secret of the beautiful relationship, we

will be so encouraged.

The meaning of the name, Naomi, is “pleasure.” Like her name, Naomi overcame the unhappy things such as lost of her husband in a foreign country. It was not because she was optimistic and positive, but she had faith that made God her pleasure. Psalm 9:2 says, “I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.” Psalm 16:11 also says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” The pleasures of the world will be gone sooner. But the pleasures of the LORD and in the LORD never be gone. We can find the path in our life by making the LORD our pleasure. Actually, Naomi never lost her faith though she lost her two sons and cried for it. She would have big blessings later by her faith.

Naomi lived in the land of Moab, but she never be tempted by gods of Moabite. She showed to her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, how the LORD, the God of Israel, was mighty and gracious by words and through her life. Later, Ruth had faith and confessed, “Your God is my God.” Naomi led Ruth to faith. Naomi never push faith to daughters-in-law by her authority as a mother-in-law. Faith was not transferred by such way. And, Naomi was not just a keeper of “the religion of Israel.” If so, she might hate or despise her pagan daughters-in-law because gentiles were excluded by “the religion of Israel.” But, she treated her pagan daughters-in-law gently and honestly since Naomi was a person who really knew the true and living God. She could show the merciful God through her gentleness and honesty.

God was “the God of Naomi” (The God Whom Naomi believed)

for Ruth who never had been in Israel and had seen the liturgy. Ruth became to know the LORD through Naomi who treated justly not only her, but also her sister-in-law. Many times, we hear an advice, saying, “Don’t see people, but fix your eyes on God.” But in reality, most people look at Christians, then say, “I want to believe in your God because you believe in God so sincerely.” How wonderful if people say to you, “I want to believe in the God Whom you believe.” Naomi lost her husband and sons, but she could win a daughter-in-law, who would be called “more than seven sons” later, through her witnessing for God. It is difficult to witnessing to family and close friends. But, please, don’t give up. Naomi lived in the most difficult situation for witnessing for God, but God used her for Ruth’s salvation. The same God is with us. Let’s believe in Him, and keep witnessing for Him.

2. Ruth's Faith

Next, let’s learn about faith of Ruth. Naomi got to know that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. Then she decided to go back to her home town, Bethlehem. She started for her home town with her daughters-in-law, but she tried them to return their mother’s house, thinking of the future of the young women. But two daughters-in-law refused and said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” Again, Naomi said to them, “Go mother’s house. Remarry and be happy.” Orpah received Naomi’s words, and kissed her mother-in-law. But Ruth clung to her.

Naomi tried to persuade Ruth again and again, and said, “Return to your home land with Orpah.” But Ruth never went after Orpah. Both

Orpah and Ruth loved Naomi. Their love to mother-in-law was the same level. Then, what made Ruth cling to Naomi? It was faith in the LORD God. As I mentioned previously, Ruth heard about the LORD God from Naomi. The main god of Moabite was called “Chemosh.” Chemosh was a selfish and cruel god who required children as offerings for him. But, the God who Ruth heard from Naomi, was holy and gracious to His people. Ruth was attracted to the God of Naomi, and she accepted “Naomi’s God” as her own God when she had to decide to follow Naomi or return to Moab.

When Orpah turned back to her home land, Naomi said to Ruth, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” This words were a part of Naomi’s persuasion to Ruth, but the words strengthened Ruth’s decision to follow Naomi. “Though Orpah has gone back to her people and to her gods, I don’t return after her, because Naomi’s people, Israel, is my people, and the LORD, the God of Israel, is my God.” Ruth set her mind to make the LORD God her own God and made a break with gods of Moabite.

In the Old Testament times, it was a big surprise that non-Israelites believed in the LORD God, the God of Israel. However, we can see some of them. Rahab of Jericho was a Canaanite, but she believed in the God of Israel and respected Him. Lord Jesus talked about the faith of a widow of Sidon, and of Naaman, commander of the army of Syria in Elijah’s times. These people and Ruth became pioneers of the coming salvation that all people of the world would return the true God through Jesus Christ.

“Your people is my people. Your God is my God.” When Naomi

heard of the words of Ruth's faith, she could say nothing to Ruth. Naomi and Ruth continued to travel to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the home town for Naomi, but it was a foreign land for Ruth. Ruth didn't know what was waiting for her in the foreign land, but she took a step of faith. Faith is not only expression of words. The creed confesses, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...." To believe is not just to be chanting it by mouth. Baptism is not only a ceremony of water. Baptism means that we confess the same faith of the first century Christians. They never deny their faith though they would be killed under persecutions. Some one may think, "Since church teaches that Jesus Christ saves human, then I also accept the statement as teachings of church as long as I come to church." But, this is not true faith. The true faith is not just to accept the Christian teachings as teachings. The true faith is that I, living now and here, receive the living God as "my God", and Jesus Christ as "my Savior." The true faith is to trust in God, and to follow Christ in the daily life. To believe is to obey. Not my will, but by the will of God, I live, always yielding myself to God.

God says, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." (Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 30:22) This promise will be fulfilled when we become the children of God by accepting Jesus Christ. As Ruth said, "Your people is my people. Your God is my God," accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and take the first step of faith. If you've already taken the step, keep walking and trusting in God step by step as you confess, "You are my God." When you face difficulties, trust in Him more.

(Prayer)

The LORD God, we appreciate that You always encourage us by the living examples of the believers of the Bible. As Naomi and Ruth trusted in You, and confessed the faith in You, help us to confess the faith and make us to take the step of faith. We pray this in Lord Jesus' name.