

Sunday School Lesson

SUNDAY, JULY 16, 1950
RUTH, A SYMBOL OF FAMILY LOYALTY

Golden Text.—Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; 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. Ruth 1:16.

Lesson Text.—Ruth 1:8, 14-22. EXPOSITION.—1. Ruth's Test, 1:8.

Ruth, the heroine of this lovely Old Testament story, and one of the most beautiful among the women-characters of the Bible, was a Moabitess by birth (ch. 2:6). The Moabites were not only heathen, but under an especial ban (Deut. 23:3). Yet Ruth was exalted by God, through faith, to become the ancestress of our Lord (Matt. 1:1, 5, 6). The purpose of this story in the history of ancient Israel is to show how God, even in the Old Dispensation, was no respecter of persons (Ac. 10:34, 35). It serves, too, as a fine example of how humanity can overlap national and racial barriers and become one in mind and spirit under one common Lord. The story belongs to the time of the judges (v. 1), and from it we get a more pleasant view of the conditions of existence in that period in which Israel was ruled by judges, than we do from the book, in Holy Scripture, which bears their name. That record presents to us the warrior side of the times; Ruth, the pastoral side, and a sweet and distinctly human side it is.

When the three women reach the dividing line between Moab and Judah, Naomi three times urges her daughter-in-law to return to their homes (vs. 8, 11, 12), not that she did not desire motive—she sought their gain. There seemed to be absolutely nothing tending to their personal advantage by going with her farther (v. 12), and Orpah reluctantly bids her farewell. But Ruth clave unto her (v. 14). The incident serves strongly to illustrate that point in human experience, when men and women

are called upon to decide whether to turn their backs on Him and go back to the pull of human ties and the friendships of the world. Large to leave home and friends and everything hitherto held dear, to go on, and forward, with Christ, or numbers of Christian believers have been called upon to face this crisis, and while some have failed, many thousands have remained steadfast so that it could be said of them: "They clave to Christ." Ruth's loving attitude, which left all to go with Naomi, illustrates what our attitude toward the Lord Jesus should be (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:33). From a worldly standpoint, Orpah seemed to make the wiser

choice, but, in the outcome, Ruth gained the most, became the mother of a long line of kings, an ancestress of the Christ, and one of the most honored women in all history. When we become Christian we may be called upon to suffer the loss of all things, but we gain infinitely more than we lose (Phil. 3:8; Rom. 8:28). Orpah went back reluctantly, perhaps, but back. She kissed her mother-in-law, but she left her. In forsaking Naomi, she forsook Jehovah, also (v. 15).

II Ruth a type of Faithfulness, 14-22. Naomi gives Ruth even one more chance to return to Moab, and bases it upon Ruth's love for Or-

pha. One of the strongest motives for loving natures in forsaking the Lord is love for those who are in the world. But while Ruth loved Orpah, she loved Naomi more. No love of any human being will draw away from Jesus one who really loves Him (2 Cor. 5:14, 15; Rom. 8:37). Orpah was "not far from the kingdom" Mk. 12:34), but she did not enter it. Naomi would not have Ruth go with her, nor will Christ have us go with Him, without fully counting the cost (vs. 9, 11, 15; Luke 14:25-33). Ruth's answer to Naomi is one of the most beautiful that ever fell from human lips (vs. 16, 17). It shows that pure love existed in these rude days, and

illustrates powerfully what our attitude should be to Him whom we love supremely. Ruth meant every word of her beautiful utterance, and lived up to it. Do we, when we say it to Jesus? Probably it was love for Naomi, in the first place, which led Ruth to love Naomi's God. Loyalty to Jehovah made the relation between these two women tender and beautiful. Ruth's choice was really a choice of Jehovah (ch. 2:12). Christ's people should be our people; Christ's God should be our God (v. 16). Where Christ dies, we should die (Gal. 2:20). We should be "buried" with Him we love (v. 17; Rom. 6:4) but we can go beyond Ruth and her words to Naomi; for

we also rise with Him (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1). Ruth would think of nothing as separating Naomi and herself but death, but even death will not separate us from Christ (Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). Naomi saw the wholeheartedness of Ruth's love and accepted it, and said no more about her going back. And so the two women came to Bethlehem, "the house of bread," a good place for hungry wanderers to come. We will find our Father's house a house of bread, too, when we come out of Moab, the far country (Luke 15:17-24). Naomi was welcome home—the one who has been in Moab always is—and there was a great

stir when she got back. Naomi had gone out full and came back empty. We do well to ponder the lessons of this lovely old story.

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Rector Rev. J. Homer Ferris,
SUNDAY, JULY 16th
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
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11:00 a.m.—Matins and Evensong
Holy Baptism by invitation with the rector.
Evening service with the rector.
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