

**Sunday Sermon 11032024 Ruth 1:1-18, Mark 12:28-34, Hebrews 9:11-14**

"Love Received vs. Love Given"

Over the past few weeks, we have searched the Word of the Lord and settled the religious concerns of the life of Job's grievous afflictions. But today we have been given the scripture of Ruth. As we unfolded this book, the contents of the first chapter made us feel pain and despair that bore our hearts stronger than the Book of Job. Is there anything worse in the world than this? What hope remains for this family?

Thomas Fuller expressed the misery of Naomi: "Women are weaker than men. Among women, older women are even weaker. Among them, the widow is more pitiful, and the poor widow is more uptight. Moreover, among the widows of poor old age, those who have no children are more disgusted, and widows of poor old age without children who have become guests in distant countries are pathetic and pitiful. In short, Naomi is the poorest person in the Bible."

Let's look at the misfortune of Elimelech's home. Biblical scholars see absolutely the cause of their unhappiness as the result of unbelief. 1) Jews have a mission to keep the land of God's inheritance (Nu 36:6–9). Nevertheless, the family moved to Moab in the Gentiles because of the threat of livelihood.

2) Another thing is that the marriage of two sons to a Moabite woman of the Gentile race was contrary to the spirit of Moses' law. Some argue that God should consider the unavoidable circumstances of Elimelech's family. It can also be hurt and grieved, 'Why does God make a severe punishment on human minor error?'

In this case, we first need to check the purpose of the entire book. The Old Testament scripture today does not elaborate on the causes of the misfortunes of Elimelech's family. However, it records how the family that has encountered the misfortune continues to rely on their God and how the God accomplishes His plan through the family.

Even if the unhappiness of Elimelech's family is a whip of God's punishment, we do not have to despair or be angry. Just as God has a standard of punishment, there is a clear standard of blessing and restoration.

Let's ponder Naomi's confession through 1:13. "It is clear that the Lord struck me with His hands." She acknowledged her mistakes before God in the context of her encounter. And she returns to Bethlehem, home to Judah, where she left ten years ago. The hometown now has a good harvest, and everyone can live without worry.

Of course, she is still lonely, poor, and sad. But the great reason she goes back to her hometown is for another reason. It is to return to the place of the fundamental faith God had commanded Israel and her family through His commandments. In other words, it was a commitment to restore the relationship with God in faith.

If so, what does it mean to say, "My daughters, return to your country and your people and your god?" I think she'd have the mindset of thinking, "I now end my past ten years. Although I had previously thought that coming to the land of Moab was the right decision and action. I am now listening to the new message of God. It is right to return to my home country, and I think now is the time."

We always need faith to appreciate and receive God's rebuke with humility. This type of faith has great value. If this rebuke was only for God's sake, for himself, this rebuke would be threatening or oppressive. But we need to know that God's rebuke is purely for us, and despite the rebuke, it is the evidence of his wide love and grace.

Here, let's consider Ruth's answer in verses 16 and 17. I do not want to focus on Ruth's faith in her confession now, but rather on the love Naomi showed to Ruth. In her confession of Naomi's daughter-in-law, we find Naomi's life, faith, action, and love.

As we know, dead people are silent. Pain is endured not by those who die but by those who are left behind. Naomi spent the past 10 years practically experiencing her soul and body, like falling into the fire pit and lion's cave. But she did not live by the influence of the environment. We can see that she has lived with a living God, even in the circumstances of the pain. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, is now confessing that point.

How did Ruth come to believe, "I want to go to where my mother is going, and I believe that the people of my mother are my own, and the God of my mother is my God?"

She married a poor son of an immigrant family. And the husband died, leaving no children. What dreams and anticipations are left for that family, and does she want to follow her mother-in-law to the end?

Her interest is elsewhere. It is because of the love Ruth received from her mother-in-law. And she experienced the work of the living God, whom Naomi believed even in during the time of hardship. Strangely, through the words and deeds of her mother-in-law, her daughter-in-law could see the hands of God's mercy in Israel, even in a house full of death. This is the privilege of the people of faith.

As a single mother-in-law living in a foreign land, it is naturally very easy to depend on her son. The relationship with her daughters-in-law is automatically problematic. But all the sons of Naomi died without having any children.

Now the daughters-in-law are given the reason and the opportunity to leave Naomi freely without any burden. In terms of conditions, their mother-in-law Naomi deserved to be the first to fall into depression and despair. But things didn't happen that way.

When a human possesses absolute faith in the Almighty, he or she can overcome any environmental threat. The Bible proves this to us through the lives of many faithful characters in the Bible. Naomi's faith in God made her able to take care of her daughters-in-law to the end with pure love.

It was never easy for a Jewish woman to live alone in an ancient gentile society without a husband and a son. Naomi, however, believed that her God, the Almighty, possessed enough love and power to restore the suffering and despair of losing her husband and sons.

# In Korea, there was a brilliant-minded girl who dreamed of becoming a diplomat in the future. She had to undergo malocclusion surgery on her jaw in the first semester of college. However, during the procedure, a medical accident occurred, and she was choking for 3 minutes.

After that, she became paralyzed and lost her sight. She was just able to start walking after 9 months of rehabilitation training in the hospital. After that, she met several world-renowned ophthalmologists, but she could not regain her eyesight again.

She felt frustrated with her life and decided to commit suicide and climbed to the top of the 15th floor of her apartment. Suddenly, she was worried about what would happen if she went to hell after she died. If she continued to suffer the pain of hell after death, she concluded that suicide was the wrong choice. She changed her mind to live and returned to college. Smart girl, right? And we also call that God's grace.

It was very hard to study with her new condition of being visually impaired. I cannot imagine how difficult that would be. However, the university was a mission school, so she had to take a course called 'Bible and Christianity'. During the lesson, she became acquainted with the Trinity God and became a believer. Four years after becoming blind, within a relatively short period of time, miraculously, she found a new hopeful life in Jesus Christ.

After she met Jesus, her life changed 180 degrees from her previous life. She learned intensively about the Bible and experienced joy, gratitude, and vision. After that, she married and gave birth to a son. She came to study in the United States, graduated from postgraduate school, and received a Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Counseling from Iowa University.

Her husband, who gave up his job in Korea, became a housekeeper for 11 years, raised the baby, cooked food, and helped and supported her all her school life in the United States. She confesses that all the miraculous things that have happened to her since she believed in Jesus were the answers to her prayer, confessing her weakness before God and asking Him for help.

She is now presenting a message of hope to all those in despair, including the suffering of those who became blind, as she has experienced before. The heart of her message is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The commandment of God's love is not a law meant to trap man but a law of miracles that truly frees man. God created human beings to enjoy genuine and eternal happiness only in His love.

Let's see Hebrews 4:12. Christ poured out His blood under the everlasting Holy Spirit and made Himself a blameless offering to God. What is the result? We have been cleansed, allowing us to leave the dead and join God in love for eternity.

The Lord paid for our sins and took away their burdens through Jesus, the one and only most expensive and clean sacrificial offering in the universe. He does not want us to keep on remembering our sins, but wants us to experience His love and power in faith.

The book of Ruth begins with two women in wretched poverty and loneliness. Who could like a story like this? But the more the story begins like this, the greater the joy of the reversal. From today, each of our stories begins again. What hope do you have today?

It doesn't matter how you are now. Whether your circumstances are good or bad, whether you depend on God in them, is the key to your future. Because the future of the children of God is in the hands of the Almighty, and he always wants to make you the hero of your new history!

What I want to emphasize is that "every human being is a weak being unable to truly love even himself until he experiences the love of God." Let us not try to love with our own strength.

The love we experience through God is true and great. Even love is a gift God gives us through Jesus Christ. So, we have the privilege and the obligation to use his love to love others. I bless you to always seek and experience the love of the Lord. Amen.

***Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:***

- 1) Naomi returns to Bethlehem after a complete failure. If you were faced with a moment of despair, where would you return? Why?
- 2) If you were a novelist, how would you develop and conclude the future of Naomi and Ruth as shown in today's text? Read the book of Ruth up to chapter 4 and compare it to the conclusion God gave them.
- 3) If you were to convert the value of the blood Jesus Christ shed for your salvation into visible and tangible goods of this world, how much would you be able to measure? Don't just say, "That's impossible," but try to do the actual calculation.