

A Wedding Meditation

Scripture: Ruth 1:16-17

This meditation, though longer than most meditations should be, may well serve busy pastors who are looking for ideas and insights on a frequently chosen wedding text.

Holy Feistiness

[Groom] and [bride], you have chosen as the theme not only for your wedding but even more importantly as the motto for your marriage, a passage of Scripture that sets a truly high standard for your relationship. It is a passage that bristles with such determination to hold on to a relationship that it sounds downright feisty.

These words were spoken by one of the most resolute, adamant, and persistent people in all of Scripture, a young woman named Ruth. But to simply say that she *spoke* them is to miss something. The truth is that they just erupted out of her, they exploded from her lips. If you could have seen her face when she spoke these words, you would have seen steely eyes, set lips, and one firm jaw.

It makes you wonder, Why such a holy feistiness? The reason is this: Naomi was trying to convince Ruth that she would be far better served by going back home to her Moabite family than by coming along with Naomi as she returns to Bethlehem. There are three compelling reasons for Ruth to quit her relationship with Naomi.

1. Naomi herself presents the first reason.

"Look," says Naomi, in one of the most plausible and persuasive speeches in all of Scripture, "what sense is there in coming with me? I don't have a thing to give you. The thing you need the most, another husband, I can't give you.

"Look at me. I may never marry again. And even if I do, I may not have children again. And even if I do, they may not be sons. And even if they are, it'll be a long wait before they would be old enough for you to marry one of them. So really, I have nothing to give you."

I'd like to pause here to point out that this is one of the main reasons marriages fail: people conclude that the relationship has nothing to give them; it's not doing them one bit of good. Instead of enriching their lives, marriage is draining them dry. And they want out. That's exactly what Naomi is saying to Ruth: There is nothing in this relationship for you. There's no way you will be fulfilled remaining with me. Save yourself. Leave. Go back home. Start over again. Get out while the getting's good.

Does this sound familiar? People say the same thing today, "As long as my marriage fulfills my life, I'll stay in. But when it doesn't, I'm out." This infection can get into anybody who's married. It can get into you.

2. Naomi's character presents the second reason.

Naomi was not a pleasant, positive person to be around at this point in her life. She was so negative, in fact, that she even insisted on changing her name. She told people, "Don't call me Naomi; call me Mara, because the Almighty God has made my life very bitter." Picture her: she never smiles, she never laughs. She's a sourpuss, and her face has all the warmth of the North Pole. All Ruth needed to do was take one look at her and say, "I don't need this in my life. This isn't going to be any fun, putting up with this grumbling, negative, bitter old woman. It's not going to be easy living with her."

Which is, I might say, another one of the major reasons why relationships end, including marriages: husband and a wife simply don't like each other anymore. They barely tolerate each other. There is no enjoyment in it anymore. In fact, they mostly just put up with each other. And that too is a threat to any marriage, including yours. Do you know that there might actually be moments, maybe even days, maybe, God forbid, even weeks when you just plain don't like each other? It happens.

3. Naomi's other daughter-in-law demonstrates the third reason Ruth might have wanted out.

Orpah, Naomi's other daughter-in-law, has seen the light. She's left Naomi and gone off in search of her dreams. Ruth watched her walk away down the road, and that must have pulled at her too. Perhaps she thought, "Maybe Orpah's right. Maybe the time has come to bail out. Maybe that is the way to go." And then, to make matters worse, it's your own partner, it's Naomi who is begging you to go that way.

It is simply amazing that Ruth didn't walk away. And it's even more amazing to hear those determined words explode from her lips. You have to ask, Where did all that come from?

Those words came from seeing something that Orpah never saw and that even Naomi at this point could not see. Ruth's eyes had been opened by God, and she saw that God had led her into Naomi's life. She'd learned that this God was the only true God (perhaps from her history lessons) and knew that only by staying close to Naomi would she stay close to this one true God, from whom all blessings flow. For her, staying in this relationship was not primarily a matter of personal happiness; it was a matter of hanging on to God and to God's blessing. At this point she probably only saw it dimly and from afar. But she saw it.

And so she spoke, and her voice must have sounded almost frosty as she said these words of pure steel:

Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.

Feisty! That's holy feistiness.

Now you are saying that is how it is going to be with you. The back door is closed and locked, and you are into this relationship for better or for worse, in sickness or in health, in poverty or in wealth; you are simply never going to walk out on one another.

How can you be so sure? You are only human. But you can be sure. The only way you can be sure is Ruth's way: by looking back and seeing God, seeing how God led you into one another's lives and believing with all your hearts today that you are here, not because of your choice but because of his calling. *God* has joined you together; there can be no putting asunder. That was the providence of God at work, and that is why you are here today.

Ruth was looking back. She saw that God's blessing was to be experienced in the very relationship God had created and that she was now being so powerfully tempted to abandon. That, and that alone, is the foundation for the kind of commitment Ruth made to Naomi and you have made today. Those words of Ruth ended up drawing her into the lineage of Christ. Repeating those same words today promises to repeat the blessing of Ruth in your marriage, drawing the life of Christ into you, your home, and your lineage.