

Love - You Know it When You See it
(If you know what you are looking for)
Ruth 1:19-2:23

Introduction:

Have you ever thought you had seen love on display, only to find out later it was not love at all. Paul gives an example for our consideration in I Corinthians,

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (13:3).

How surprising to discover that philanthropist and martyrs may sacrifice all without having genuine love as their motivation. You may recall the story of the widow who placed the smallest donation in the offering and was recognized for the purity of her motive. Jesus said on that occasion that the sum total of all the offerings given without purity of motive could not equal the value of the widow's mite. Sometimes the greatest display of love is in the smallest activity. Today we are so given to the grandiose and great things that we overlook the activities where God has placed His approval, His interest, His power, and His love on display.

If we are looking for true love in the activities of life we must know how to spot the signs, because Satan, the master of camouflage and counterfeit, is always parading cheap substitutions of the original in order to distract and deceive. Therefore, in our quest to find true love we should quickly review the signs of what we are looking for. Paul again comes to our aid providing a checklist for verification of genuine love:

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails . . .” (I Corinthians 13:4-8a).

With this information in mind let us return to the book of Ruth and our series on Love. I have been given the title for my sermon, “Love - You Know it When You See it.” The text I have been assigned for the sermon is Ruth 1:19 -2:23. This section has 6 paragraphs (1:19-21; 1:22-2:3; 2:4-7; 2:8-13; 2:14-16; and 2:17-23). I don't have time to look into the viewfinder and perfectly compose a picture of each paragraph, so I have decided to provide snapshots of the paragraphs and specifically call to your attention genuine love on display (and remember sometimes it will be in the smallest detail).

I. The first snapshot I would like to call to your attention is seen in Ruth 1:19, 22 - The Return (Love does not seek its own).

A. Selflessness and Sacrifice

The two women in the snapshot have revealed love in their refusal to put self interest first. Visualize this snapshot. Two women are on a journey - One is leaving home, the

other is going home, yet love has placed them together traveling in the same direction. Consider the background of the snapshot - somewhere beyond the horizon is the one time home of Ruth (the home she is now leaving to go with Naomi to the home she once left). Where is home really? If home is where the heart is Ruth would tell us the heart has a vertical and horizontal affection.

B. Vertical and Horizontal Affection

Vertically Ruth's love is fixed on being wherever God is honored and worshiped. Horizontally she is determined to remain with Naomi who taught her the necessity of the vertical love - a love for God.

Therefore in simple summary: Ruth has determined to be with Naomi and her people because she wants to know, love and serve their God (who is now her God). Ruth is showing a love for God that aligns with the love Jesus taught one must have to follow Him. Jesus said, "If anyone will come after me he must love me more than mother, father, sister, brother . . . even more than he loves his own life" (Luke 14:26). Ruth manifests a love that is incomparable to all other affections - the greatest love, (outlined the first commandment), loving "God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Mark 12:30).

Love does not seek its own. - In this snapshot we see true love in both Naomi and Ruth. Naomi had given both her widowed daughters-in-law encouragement to return to their families. This is a display of selflessness. No doubt Naomi wanted company in her journey homeward, but her selflessness and true love for her daughters-in-law prompted her to advise them to do what she thought was best for their future. In response one daughter-in-law, Orpah, returned to the home of her people, but Ruth could not. Naomi was tethered to the true God and Ruth would not leave her side. Yes, there would be family awaiting Ruth's return home, but there she would not find anyone who knew the God who was God. Ruth said to Naomi, "your God will be my God"(). In essence she wanted to die where the people of God lived, and she wanted to remain tethered to Naomi even to death. What a display of selflessness and sacrifice prompted by genuine love. Truly, Love seeks not its own.

II. The second snapshot of love is unveiled in Ruth 1:20-21 - The Confession - (Love rejoices not in iniquity, but in truth.)

A. Loving the People of God is Evidenced by Loving God and Keeping His Commandments (I John 5:2).

The very first order of business Naomi attended to when she returned home was that of verifying the fact that walking away from God in times of trouble has consequences. In love for God and His people she emphatically testified there were no blessings awaiting God's people outside the security found in obedience to His Word and in the fellowship of His people.

B. A New Testament Illustration: Simon Peter.

We all remember Peter's denial of Christ. I don't think words can describe the sense of worthlessness Peter felt after this tragic failure. He decided there was only one option for him and that was to walk away from his call and to return to the fishing business. Other disciples joined him (John 21:3). Now what happens when people walk away from God in times of trouble?

No blessings. The morning after Peter's first night of fishing he was met by Christ calling out from the shore, "Do you have any fish?" They answered, "No, NONE!" Jesus instructed them to cast the net on the right side of their boats. They obeyed and the nets were filled. Then Peter jumped overboard and swam ashore. Jesus already had fish on the grill awaiting the disciples for breakfast. As they dined Jesus started a conversation with Peter. What was the main subject of that conversation? Love. Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Each time Peter affirmed his love to which Jesus responded, "Feed my sheep." How does one feed the family of God? Peter, who was assigned the task, answers in I Peter 5: 3 by "being examples to them." Naomi and Peter knew what it was to come home with empty nets, but they both knew the way to return was by acknowledging the fruitlessness of walking away from God and the fruitfulness in dedication to being an example of loving God in times of great difficulty. Who would join Naomi and Peter in confession of feeling the temptation to walk away from your call to serve and love Christ? Love confesses wrong and seeks to establish a testimony of renewal of commitment to God and His Family.

C. A Song for Consideration: Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. One line in this hymn is seldom confessed though often sensed,

"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above."

III. The third snapshot of love is conveyed in Ruth 2:1-10. The Welcome - Love is Kind

A. As a woman and a stranger in a foreign land, Ruth knew going out to find work would be difficult and could be dangerous (Ruth 2: 9), but Ruth's love for Naomi and her concern for her well fair put aside any fear of consequence.

B. Ruth's determination to provide for Naomi could not be deterred (Ruth 2:20). Love's kindness overcomes fear, welcomes faith and pursues the benefit of others. Love's kindness can be heard in Jesus' words, "... the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

IV. The fourth snapshot of love is clearly pictured in Ruth 2:4-10. The Surprise - Love is not Puffed Up.

Notice the joyful welcome and celebration in the greetings between Boaz, (the wealthy landowner), and his humble servants (Ruth 2:4). Boaz rides in, not as one who is unapproachable, but as the person most concerned for those in his employment. He surveys the situation and focuses his attention on the lowest of all servants, the gleaner (and not only the gleaner, but the one working behind the gleaners. Ruth's position was gathering the leftovers of the leftovers). It was obvious, even at a distance, that Ruth was a foreigner and was not like other

maidservants (2:13). Therefore we can see why she was absolutely shocked that Boaz not only noticed her, but gave her personal attention. Ruth was so humbled she fell on her face and bowed to the ground with one question, "Why me?" The one question was met with one reason, Ruth 2:11-12. Ruth was reaping what she had sown! And what a harvest! Boaz said, "The Lord repay your work and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12). No more precious nor priceless words had ever come to the ears of Ruth. The God who she left all to pursue, had placed her under his sheltering wings!

V. The fifth snapshot of love is found in Ruth 2:13-16. A Place at the Table - Love is not rude.

It would be rude to make someone who is out of their comfort zone more uncomfortable by exclusion. Boaz was not about to let Ruth eat alone. He said to Ruth, "Come here and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar . . . and he passed parched grain to her" (Ruth 2:14). Ruth, an outsider, had a place just for her at the master's table. Imagine that! Love's invitation! Jesus has sent his church out to gather people from the hedges and highways, calling out to all "Come and dine!" Dine at the Master's table! There's a place just for YOU! If you come to church and feel shunned let me tell you something, there's something wrong and the problem is not with you. Every Christian in this place wants you to know the Master is calling you to come to Him and we are excited about your place reserved at His table.

VI. The sixth and final snapshot is seen in Ruth 2:17-23. Love is at the core of salvation by grace through faith in the Redeemer. Love suffers long, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things, LOVE NEVER FAILS!