

Cling to the Lord

by Alphaus Mdlalose

The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying in God's place, persevering in our spiritual journey, and avoiding the dangers of compromise and backsliding.

Duration: 1:12:22

Scripture: Genesis 19:16-17, Ruth 1:8, Ruth 1:14, Matthew 6:33, Romans 7:15, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Seeking Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a mother and her imprisoned son. The son pleads with his mother to seek help from a powerful witch doctor to influence the outcome of his trial. However, the mother, being a Christian, is faced with a moral dilemma. The speaker draws parallels between this story and biblical examples, such as the prodigal son and Peter's denial of Jesus. The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying true to one's faith and seeking forgiveness and mercy from God.

Transcript

Let's turn to the Bible and we look at the book of Ruth. And you'll excuse me if I read quite a few verses and I'll be jumping around to different verses. We start with Ruth chapter 1, starting with verse 8. And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house.

The Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that ye might find rest, each one of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voice and wept.

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. Let's now jump to verse 14, where it says in verse 14, if I can separate the pages, And they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth claved to her or stuck to her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods. Return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee.

For whither thou goest, I will go, and whither thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. Let's bow and pray. Father in heaven, we've read from your holy word.

And we ask you, Father, to please help us by explaining it through your Holy Spirit. And Lord, if possible, let there not be one who will go out without having been blessed and changed. And we ask all this, asking because of your mercies.

Amen. Now, this book is called the book of Ruth. Now, there are some commentators who say that it was penned during the time of the judges of Israel.

There are some who say that the particular judge who was ruling or in whose dispensation it was, was Ehud. Other commentators say it was during the time of Gideon. Other commentators say it was during the time of Gideon.

What we can agree on, though, is that this story, especially the beginning, did happen towards the beginning of the era of the judges, because it refers to Boaz, and he was in the beginning of the dispensation of the judges. And we are told of a particular story that happens in Bethlehem in Judah. And it tells us, right from the beginning, exactly the name of the people, the family, and those who dwelt in Bethlehem.

And it was the case that in this time in Bethlehem of Judah that there was a severe famine. Despite the fact that Bethlehem, in its original language, means the house of bread, nevertheless, in that very place, there was the shortage of bread, there was famine. You might also remember and recall that David shepherded his father's sheep in this area of Bethlehem at one time.

And it was also in this very place of Bethlehem where the prophet came to anoint David during the dispensation of King Saul. And more than that, our Lord Jesus Christ was born in this very village of Bethlehem. Now, I've said already that this town, Bethlehem, was known, or the meaning of it is house of bread.

But remarkably, in this place where there should have been an abundance of bread, there was a shortage, there was famine. So that the nation of Israel, the people of God, were not able to receive what they should have been receiving. Yes, there were circumstances which had brought this upon them.

There were enemies who had attacked them. God had allowed it to happen because they had sinned against God and the Lord had raised up their enemies against them. In fact, the Gentile nations were living with an abundance of food.

And it was for that reason that this particular family, which is referred to here right at the beginning of Ruth, left Bethlehem, this house of bread, and went to dwell among the Gentiles. In normal circumstances, one would expect them to be found in Bethlehem, in that place where God was and where it was named the house of bread. But as they observed their own circumstances of misery and compared themselves to the Gentile nations around them, they reckoned that it would be far better off for them to emigrate to these Gentile areas and get food.

Now, dear children of God, there is the place where God has called us. There is the place spiritually where God expects us to be every day. But if you find that your Christian life has become half-hearted, lukewarm, then you are missing out on the place where God wants to find you.

If you start missing out on the rich life of being a Christian and you become superficial and lukewarm, then you miss out on being there where God wants you to be, in that place. And you find yourself beginning to become weak as a Christian and you begin to notice the abundance of the Gentiles around you, some of

those who live in extreme comfort, and you are drawn in that direction. And you lose your peace.

And perhaps you see the world around you living quite happily and are quite fine in the way that they live in their sins and you think, Well, what's actually wrong with me living like them? Let me join them. And so we find here a family that leave their dwelling place and go and live in the land of Moab. Yes, it's true, they had a very serious reason for leaving Bethlehem and going to the land of Moab.

However, I want you to notice what happens to them when they arrive in Moab and what experiences they had to endure there. And perhaps you need to compare them with yourself. If you've left your dwelling place where God wants you to be spiritually and you find that you have fallen into a backslidden state and you've lost that strength, then you too might be having miserable circumstances and experiences like them in the land of Moab.

Let me just explain shortly about Moab. You probably know about their history, I won't go into detail. But one particular detail is that as God's people had left the land of Egypt and they were redeemed out of Egypt and were on their way to the land of Canaan, the Bible does say that as they approached the Jordan River, which was between them and Canaan, they pitched their tents in the land of Moab.

And they stayed with this nation of Moab. And so you found the children of Israel lived for a while with the children of Moab. And the Bible explains that the Moabites wanted to attack the Israelites but were too afraid of them.

Why so? It is because they had been observant. They had heard what had been happening, that the children of Israel, wherever they had gone, wherever they had travelled, tribe after tribe had been conquered. But listen now to what Moab had then done.

They thought up a strategy whereby they would conquer Israel or bring them down. Because they couldn't fight and do battle against them, they had another plan. They decided that they need to get the Israelites into conflict with their God.

Because it seemed like their God was the problem. And if they could bring some division between them and their powerful God, then the Moabites could attack them properly. Now, the Moabites were idol worshippers.

Now, the Moabites had a particular idol which they worshipped on top of Mount Pior, or Prior, and they would go up the mountain to worship that idol. And they began to take some of the Israelites up their mountain to their idol to teach them the ways and the rituals of how to worship these foreign idols. They realised that if they could give the Israelites an alternative spiritual experience, it would bring conflict between them and their God, and then they would be conquerable.

And they got their daughters to marry the sons, and there was intermarriage between them and the Israelites, and there was therefore a falling away from their God. That is why Joshua finally had to reprove them very strongly by saying, we need to sanctify ourselves. Let's get rid of all of these things to do with the Moabites and be made holy so that we will be enabled to cross the Jordan and go into the land of promise.

If you're a Christian, ask yourself the question, am I living a compromised life influenced by the Moabites, and I've joined forces with them, and I have a spiritual experience that is now more Moabite, than Christian. Now this particular family from Bethlehem went and lived among the Moabites for many years.

His intention was actually to save his family from famine, he wanted to rescue them.

But now look at some of the things that happened there in the land of Moab. He himself, the father of the family, died there in Moab. His two sons married daughters of the Moabites, the very nation of which God had said, do not intermarry with the Moabites.

And his sons also died there among the Moabites. Now it may well be that the father of the home, who had emigrated to the land of Moab, felt that he was strong enough spiritually to protect his family, and that all the evil influences of the Moabites would not be allowed to find entry into his family, he would be the protecting influence. Many Christians make that same mistake, they begin to get along with unbelievers, and take on their habits, and begin to live like the pagans, thinking that they are strong enough spiritually to handle it, and eventually you find them living in just the same way as the pagans.

He speaks like them, he does the same things which they do, he speaks their lingo, he also dresses like they do, and he takes up the habits and the particular ways of those people, the pagans. So now when this family was there with the Moabites, the father of this Jewish family died. Now their two sons had married two daughters of this Gentile nation, and had brought them home.

One of them was Opa, and the other one was Ruth, and they lived for quite a long time with their mother-in-law Naomi. And after some time, both of these boys, both of these young men died. I want you to take careful note of what then happens after the death of these two young men.

Naomi found herself in a tremendous struggle, not knowing what to do with these two daughters-in-law of hers, and one day it got to such a point that she felt she had to call them in and have a straight talk with them. And so she started the discussion. She said, my daughters, I'm getting up to go to the land of Israel, to the place where I actually belong.

As I was reading this text, my heart rejoiced over certain words. Then she arose to go. It says in verse 6, Then she arose to go, and that is referring to the fact that she now was getting up to go, she was in the process of getting up to go to Bethlehem.

And in verse 7, it emphasizes it by saying, wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was. It is as if Naomi has a strong urge to return to the place where she belongs, and she cannot contain herself any longer, she must go. It is like she has the realization, I am a Hebrew, and here I am living among the Moabites.

The Bible says, then she got up. She arose and left the place where she was. She went forth, and she said, I'm going back to the land where I come from, the land of the Lord.

She took steps, she said it, and she did it. I'm reminded of something we find in the book of Revelations. You don't have to turn to it now in your Bibles, but just remember in Revelations 18, where it speaks about Babylon.

Where the angel of God shouted forth to the children of God, who there was a little remnant of children of God still in Babylon, where he said, get out of Babylon immediately, make haste. The angel of God shouted with a loud voice, children of God, depart out of Babylon. It's a similar urge that Naomi has as she says, I'm going back to my land, the land of the Lord, and I'm leaving this land of Moab.

It's also similar to the incident with Abraham. You remember the story? Where God said to Abram, leave this place and go forth. And Abraham did just that.

He went forth, he left his people, he left his nation, their idols, and he went out just as God commanded. Now Naomi left the place where she was living. You could compare it to the prodigal son.

Remember when he was in the pigsty? When there was a moment of illumination? When it finally dawned on him, this is not the place where I ought to be. I have a home, there is the place, my father's house is where I should be. Now in the process, Naomi then called her two daughters-in-law and said, now I'm leaving to my home place.

I want you to go back to your homes. Now listen to what the Bible says. And it says in verse 10, that they said unto her, Firstly they, end of verse 9, they lifted up their voice and wept and said unto her, surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

Both of them said, we will never desert you, we will accompany you wherever you go. Naomi said a second time, pleaded with them, please don't come with me, stay where you are, go to your homes, go to your respective homes, I need to go back to my land. And then in verse 14, it says that they lifted up their voice and wept again.

The type of crying that is described here in the Bible is not just a quiet, gentle weeping, but it was a strong weeping, a mournful cry that shows deep sorrow. And both of them promised, they said we will never leave you. Like Christians today, who make promises, they say, Lord take my life, take all I have O Lord, and work through me as you will.

But you find that same Christian who makes that commitment, after a while they begin to do the same sinful things that they had been doing in the past, with that same body. You will find that a parent, if their child is sick, the parent cries out in their grief, an agonized prayer to God saying, O Lord, if you will only heal my child, I will serve you forever. But after the healing they break their promises, so we who are here in this audience, we need to look back into our past.

Are there times when we have made a vow before the Lord, have we broken those vows? If you have made a promise to God, the Bible says, keep your promise, for God will call us to account and that will be held against you. We find that the people of this world very easily make promises. Remember when Jesus said to his disciples, I must go up to Jerusalem, I will be handed over to sinners and then over to death.

Remember Peter's response? How Jesus said, you will all desert me, Peter said, never Lord, even if the others desert you, every one of them, but I will never do it. But when it came to the crunch time, Peter failed. When the Lord was standing before those high priests and that, Peter denied the Lord.

You know the story. Even when they said to Peter, aren't you one of them, one of the followers of Jesus, one of his disciples, he said, I do not know the man. And when another said, but you are one of his followers, he said very strongly, I am definitely not one of them, I have got nothing to do with the man.

Who was that vowing and telling them that he didn't know him? It was the very man who promised he would never fail the Lord and desert him. So here we find in our text, Orpah and Ruth crying and weeping, saying, we will never desert you. But observe in the Bible what happens next.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And this very Orpah who kissed her mother-in-law and said, I will never desert you, then got up and did go back to her people and returned to her idols, to her old life, to her old friends. And so Christians, maybe among us here, there are those who have gone back to the old life, back to the old ways, the very ways which you have parted from when you turned to the Lord.

So Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned back to the old ways. The same Orpah who vows not to leave her mother-in-law, kisses her and does the very thing she promises not to do and goes back. In the Bible, there is hardly anything as painful as seeing a person who goes back to the old life.

That's why in the Bible, in Luke chapter 9, the Lord says, he who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not worthy of the kingdom. He is not worthy of the kingdom of heaven. So God makes a very clear distinction and says, this person is not worthy of entering into heaven.

Whereas this one is. So what manner of person is not allowed or is not worthy of entering into the kingdom? It is the one who places his hand on the plow, starts the work, but then goes back. So even if you are in your church, this church, or in your denomination, you've put your hand to the plow, making a decision for the Lord, but then you turn back to the old sinful ways.

God says you are not worthy of his kingdom. Remember the wife of Lot. Remember when Lot and them were in Sodom and Gomorrah, they did find mercy from the Lord.

Lot and his family found grace from God. For just before the cities were to be destroyed, God said to Lot and his family, now leave these cities for they are about to be destroyed. Leave with your family.

The Bible says that as Lot delayed, you see the children of men often delay. The Bible says that the angels then grasped Lot and dragged him and his family, pulled them out. That shows the real mercy of God.

And so they left Sodom and Gomorrah. And they were told, flee so that you will be rescued. Flee this place so that you might be saved.

I wonder if there are any in our midst who have gone back spiritually. Maybe things that you had confessed as sin before, you have now gone back to those very selfsame things. Maybe the old pals that you apologised to because you were doing sinful things together, you are back in the same company again.

Maybe at conversion, God gave you a divine hatred for certain sins, but now you have gone back to them again. The Lord said through his angel, now escape, run, flee for your life so that you will be saved. And they were told, do not even glance back.

Lot's wife heard those words, do not glance back. She also heard that they had to flee. She was told that they should not remain on the plains.

She knew that the order was, flee to the heights. But because, as the Bible says, the heart is wicked and deceitful so that no man can fathom it, she did look back. And as you know, she turned into a pillar of salt.

Remember the children of Israel had left Egypt, but Egypt had not left their hearts. When they would meet up with a problem, immediately they would remember Egypt. Whenever there was the slightest difficulty,

their hearts yearned for Egypt.

And they would remember the things and the luxuries of Egypt. And you know, dear Christian, that the enemy can come to you in the same way. He can come and say, yes, you have confessed all your sins, But don't you remember how nice this particular thing was which you used to do, and that what pleasure it brought you? Try and bring back those memories, the feeling, the emotion.

And the devil will say, yes, you have confessed it, you have repented, but just try and remember it a little. And you'll find, some Christians don't actually go back to those sins, they simply live in the past. They live in their memories.

They don't live them out, they live them in their memories. And they are able to even recall the emotions that were attached to those experiences of the past. That is why Jesus said, this nation worships me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Although the Israelites had been redeemed, rescued out of Egypt, but their hearts still remained there. Now we've been speaking about Opa who kissed her mother-in-law and then went back. Let's now look at Ruth.

It says that her mother-in-law then spoke to Ruth, saying, look, your sister-in-law has gone back. And expanding on that, she says in verse 15, and has gone back to her gods. Why don't you go back with your sister-in-law? Go back with her, go back to the old.

But now take note of her response. The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that Ruth clung to her mother-in-law and she would not let her go. She stuck to her.

Although the other one had gone back, Ruth clung to her. Verse 16, Ruth said, entreat me not to leave you or to return from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go.

And wherever you stay, I will stay. And your people shall be my people. And your God shall be my God.

If only we would have this spirit that was in Ruth, this spirit that would make us cling to the Lord Jesus Christ in a similar fashion. Ruth clung to her mother-in-law and stuck to her, come what may. Even though her mother-in-law was now a widow and Ruth was still young.

She left her own people, the Moabites. She left her gods. She left her gods and her people and she clung to Naomi.

And said, your people shall be my people. Not the Moabites now. For your people shall be my people.

In other words, your people who serve the living God, they shall be my God. Now, all of us have got people, family members who don't serve the Lord. But if we can cling to the Lord Jesus like Ruth clung to her mother-in-law.

With the attitude that I'm going to cling to the Lord Jesus Christ even if others don't. Even if my loved ones don't and my family don't. I will stick to Him.

She said, your God will be my God. In other words, the God of Israel. The God who sees.

The God who has no fellowship with sin. The same God that commanded Joshua to sanctify the people of God before they crossed over because of all the filth that they had picked up among the Moabites. So that they'd be sanctified before they crossed into the promised land.

If we as a people of God, as the church of God would stick to God, would cling to Him as Ruth did. Where one can say, yes, there are my friends, there are my relatives that don't follow the Lord, but I will cling to the Lord Jesus. She also said, where you die, I will die too.

And I will be buried there too. And may the Lord do so to me if anything but death should part us. She was saying, in other words, only death can separate us.

If only Christians would have this spirit of saying, nothing but death would part me from you. Even if the things of the world are very present and imminent. Even if they are attractive.

Or if you meet with a difficult circumstance. That you'd rather say, only death will part me. Now, in closing, let's have a look at the life of this widow, Naomi.

So even though Naomi had been among the Moabites for a long time, she still clung to the Lord. She still remembered where she came from. And we can pick that up by the way that Ruth speaks.

Because Ruth says, and your God will be my God. And by that, the implication is that Naomi did not worship the other gods. It shows that Naomi had one Ruth over to serving the living God.

Because it can happen in the opposite direction. There are attractions in the world that can cause you to be so distracted that you are turned away from the living God. I once told you about a certain Christian who gave his testimony in another place.

This was a lady, quite elderly, who said, I got converted and I left all my sins. She said though, after many years when my children were already grown up and adults. My youngest son used to go around with gangsters, would smoke marijuana and got involved in criminal activities and was arrested.

When he was jailed, I went to visit him in prison. She said, I saw him on the other side of the prison bars. She said, when the boy saw his mother, he wept tears.

I saw the tears streaming down the face of my son. He said, Mother, I know that you are a Christian. I know that you live for the Lord.

And I know that you have parted from the things of the world. But Mother, here I am imprisoned. Mother, please help me.

Mother, do me a great favor. There is a powerful witch doctor who lives in a certain place. Please go to that witch doctor and get me a strong potion that I'll use on the day of the trial to influence the outcome of the trial.

Mother, you don't have to worry. You don't have to use the potion. I will use it.

You are a Christian. I'll use the potion. He was saying this while tears were streaming down his cheeks.

The mother said her heart broke. She said she waited until it was night. I was alone at home thinking about my boy in prison.

And then at night when it was really dark and no Christians could see me, in the darkness of the night when no Christian could see me or recognize me, I secretly went to that witch doctor. And I came back with that witchcraft potion and I gave it to my boy in prison. And she testified later on that from that very moment the love of Jesus came to a complete end in her heart.

Reading the Bible and prayer became a foreign thing to her completely from that very moment. And the joy of having fellowship with the Christians whom I used to enjoy fellowship with, I no longer enjoyed their company. I preferred to be in the company of worldly people.

She said every Christian characteristic came to an utter end in me. You see, she found herself in a situation where she let go of God and she turned aside. It could be that where you are seated right here, you find yourself in the very same condition.

You've lost everything. You've lost the love of Christ in your heart. You've lost your peace.

You've lost your spiritual strength. It's all gone because of what has happened to you. Your love of reading your Bible has gone.

The joy of meeting with Christians and having fellowship with them is gone. And you much prefer to meet with non-believers and speak about worldly things. But Ruth clung to Naomi.

Even though it was a very difficult circumstance, she clung to her until they arrived in Bethlehem. You know, the Bible says that after some time, Ruth got married again in Bethlehem. She got married to Boaz.

And they had a child whose name was Obed. Obed brought forth a son called Jesse. Jesse was the father of the hero David.

So David came out of the family of Ruth, this very person who clung. And many generations later, Jesus was born in that very generational line, this person who clung. You Christian, where are you? Are you in Bethlehem or do you find yourself in Moab? Spiritually, are you clinging to Jesus or do you find yourself distanced from Him? So this is a good opportunity for you today.

If you find yourself in this condition that you are in the Moabites, say, Lord, I have to confess, I am with the Moabites today, not in Bethlehem. I know, Lord, that I have glanced back, I've looked back. Lord, and then you can ask the Lord for mercy and for forgiveness.

And then cling to Him, He who forgives and cleanses you. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that you've recorded this beautiful story for us.

And Lord, not only is it beautiful, but it contains lessons of life and death. It contains lessons of eternal consequences of heaven and hell. And though it was written so long ago, Lord, we see ourselves in this book of Ruth.

And Lord, if there are those in our midst who sense being convicted by a spirit that they are like Orpah, who've gone back, even though they have some affection for you, but they've gone back to their gods, Lord, enable them to repent. And Lord, give us the grace not just to repent, but to turn from our sin, never to go back to them again. That we leave our sins at the cross.

That we cling to you. For Lord, you clung to us at the cross. You clung to us in your burial.

And you clung to us in your resurrection. And so Lord, we want to be wholly identified with you. And live the resurrection life.

Not the Moab life. Be gracious to everyone here. And also to those who may listen to this message later on.

That it would reach them with the power of the Holy Spirit. And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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