

## **Purpose-Driven Acts Of Conciliation**

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On this Pentecost weekend it is very likely that you will hear a message that either refers to, is anchored in, or is completely out of the book of Ruth. As most of you know very well, the Jews assigned reading of the book of Ruth to Pentecost because the time setting of the story is basically from the wave sheaf offering to the day of Pentecost. Naomi returned with her Moabitess daughter-in-law Ruth from Ruth's native land where Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion had gone to escape the famine.

Then, following the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, and after both of Naomi's daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, had expressed a fervent desire to return with Naomi to her people. Only Ruth was driven by the convicting force of God's Spirit. It was only Ruth who responded with love and admiration to cleave to Naomi, pledging her undiminished devotion to her and everything she held dear, including her great God. Ruth and Naomi returned to Israel just as the barley harvest began and Ruth toiled in the fields to support them both through the 50 days to Pentecost.

The book, to the Jews, represented so many of the things that were part of their responsibilities under the Old Covenant, along with this theme of physical redemption and reconciliation. But we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are now able to see the spiritual lessons of the book that even King David could not see. But I want us to keep in mind that David most certainly knew the story of his great grandmother, Ruth, and her devoted conciliatory efforts that brought redemption and reconciliation that could only come from the driving force of God to fulfill His plans and purpose. David obviously knew that it was only through God's Holy Spirit that real redemption and reconciliation can take place, as we see from his own magnificent prayer for forgiveness as recorded in Psalm 51 (almost in the same place that Charles was referring to). In this prayer David pleads for God to mercifully restore a steadfast spirit in Him under the direction of God's Holy Spirit.

With this in mind, although we will not be examining the book of Ruth today, I would like to remind you of what David knew of his great grandmother as written in Ruth 1.

**Ruth 1:7-9** Therefore she [Naomi] went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went out on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to 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 you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Then, following Naomi's very logical plea to Orpah and Ruth to return to their own people and the rest they can find with their husband's house, we read in verses 15 through 17 Ruth's wonderful answer that David had to understand.

**Ruth 1:15-17** And she [Naomi] said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

Now let us fast forward to David's lifetime and a biblical character who we know very little about but I think may be another example of conciliatory devotion that probably struck a very familiar chord with David. Please turn with me to II Samuel where we will see that David, in one of the lowest points in his life, as Absalom is in the midst of overthrowing his father's rule and usurping his God-given throne. We now come to the time when David was fleeing from Jerusalem with a relatively small group of faithful followers (compared to the tens of thousands that Absalom had mustered to overthrow his father).

However, David, in his faith, would not even allow the Levites to remove the ark of the covenant from the city that had taken it from and take it with them. David told them to carry it back and then it was up to God to make a decision on whether He should bring him back or not. With this trust in God and David's memory of his great grandmother in mind, please turn to II Samuel 15 and we will begin to read in verse 13. Here we will see David, like the captain of a sinking ship in distress. Like the mourning Naomi, we find him standing in a spot so all who are fleeing with him pass before him in review so that he can be sure of the safe passage of all them out of Jerusalem across the Kidron toward the Mount of Olives.

**II Samuel 15:13-23** Now the messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with the Absalom." So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword." And the king's servant said to the king, "We are your servants, ready to do whatever my lord the king commands." Then the king went out with all his household after him. But the king left ten women concubines to keep the house. And the king went out with all the people after him, and he stopped at the outskirts.

Then all his servants passed before him; and all the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed before him before the king. Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also going with with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you." But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also be your servant will be." So David said to Ittai, "Go, and cross over." Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all his little ones who are with him crossed over. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the

Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness.

It is interesting to note that perhaps from this meeting with Ittai, David's spirit and trust in God was renewed enough to send back God's Ark to its proper place in Jerusalem.

**II Samuel 15:24-29** There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. Then the king said to Zadok [this is after his conversation with the Ittai], "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus, 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me what seems good to Him." The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." Therefore, Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there.

Who was Ittai, and why, like Ruth with Naomi, would he pledge his loyalty to David and the great God Jehovah, whom David served in spite of the dire circumstances? And was this tender pledge of loyalty a source for helping David renew his own loyalty and trust in God? We only see Ittai the Gittite one more place in the Bible and that is II Samuel 18 where David placed him in charge of one-third of his army against the armies of Absalom.

**II Samuel 18:1-2** And David numbered the people who were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. Then David sent out one third of the people under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you myself."

And the people told David he could not go because they did not want him to die. He was worth more than all of them together.

**II Samuel 18:5-7** Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave the captains orders concerning Absalom. So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel. And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day.

From this point forward, unlike Ruth, Ittai is never mentioned again and what happened to him is not clear at all. In my research, I could only find speculation. However, it may be speculation for us to consider if we tie this stranger in Israel to Ruth's conviction and loyalty. Some have speculated that Ittai was the son of Achish, David's benefactor when David fled from Saul into the land of the Philistines and remained with his 600 men for 16 months in the city of Ziklag that was given to him by Achish himself. This whole episode in David's life as recorded at I Samuel 27 and 28, seems to show a very dark period of David, when things were not exactly what they should have been. But I would like you to note something in I Samuel 28.

**I Samuel 28:1-2** Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men." So David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever."

**I Samuel 29:1-5** Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by the hundreds and thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish. Then the princes of the Philistines

said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he has defected to me." But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, "Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in battle he becomes our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to this master, if not with the heads of these men? Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying" 'Saul has he slain thousands, and David has ten thousands'?"

Anyway, down through the end of chapter 11, Achish sends David back to Ziklag because he knew the situation and that kept David out of a difficult situation, even though he was only there to protect Achish. Because it seems that David and Achish clearly understood the reality of what was happening in spite of what we read in to this prior in chapter 27, David could never fight against his own people and Achish apparently really knew what was going on and therefore made him the trusted captain of his personal protection detail rather than compromise David's allegiance.

Perhaps, within this position, Ittai got to know David in all the circumstances of his life, including his anointed position as king. Perhaps Ittai, in spite of David's seemingly less than honest dealings to remain in this Philistine sanctuary from Saul, got to know and respect the man who his own father trusted with his life. Perhaps it is here that Ittai learned from David of the one true God that bound them together. We see at the time of David's flight to Jerusalem, that Ittai himself is called an exile from the land of the Philistines. And perhaps it is because of the close bond that had been developed between Achish, David, and the young Ittai years before and that now Ittai is to be exiled by the Philistines. Now with his 600 he bound himself to defend David just as David bound himself to defend Achish with his 600.

Again, this can only be speculation, but this will fit into the remainder of the sermon as we consider what Ruth, the defenseless Moabitess, and the more powerful Philistine stranger Ittai, did in response to God's leading Spirit and the redemption and reconciliation that can only come from God.

We are now going to take what you may consider an abrupt turn here in the sermon. But please always keep in mind Ruth and all who will eventually be reconciled to the Family of God through Jesus Christ, and what God expects from each of us individually.

In response, we are going to look at a very subtle difference between two English words. But I hope you are going to see that the fine line difference between these words will help us more effectively understand the way God expects us to conduct our lives in conjunction with the way He is reconciling His whole creation to Himself. It is the difference between what God expects from us and absolute trust and the work that only He can do. I hope this will give us another way to consider our relationships, not only within the body of Christ, but with those who are still held in the grips of the self-centered slavery of the carnal mind driven by Satan's pride and self-righteousness.

We all know and say that we can only be reconciled to God by means of Jesus Christ. And it is only through His sacrificial work that we are being united as one body to the Father and Son. But I hope we will see today through the almost imperceptible difference in these two English words that I am going to mention, that we certainly have work to do, but in no way can accomplish what God alone can and will continue to do.

The words which you have already heard a number of times in this sermon are reconciliation and the others seldom used but very real partner to reconciliation. That word is conciliate or conciliation. Their definitions are so closely woven that many sources I checked makes them interchangeable, even though they really are not, as we will see.

As I was preparing for this sermon quite a while ago and was considering the vast separation of mankind from God and the separation of men from one another, even within the church, I began to study reconciliation. However, as I was thinking about being reconciled, I had a curious notion. If there is a

word reconciliation, meaning to join again, does the word conciliation indicate a process that joins things together in the first place? It was just one of those extemporaneous thoughts that may pop into your mind as you are linking things together, but hardly worth a follow up.

But this time I decided to look it up and what I found gave me a little different angle to more clearly see the work God expects from His called out ones today as opposed to the work that only He can do. From the sources I researched, I think these are the best definitions for the purposes of this message. And it is linked to what God expects us to do to more completely develop the same mind of loyal devotion towards one another that Ruth and Ittai had for Naomi and David.

As nouns, the difference between conciliation and reconciliation is that conciliation is the action of bringing peace and harmony, the action of ending strife, while reconciliation is the reestablishment of friendly relations. As verbs, the difference between conciliate and reconcile is that conciliate is make calm and content, placate, while reconcile is to restore a friendly relationship, to bring back to harmony.

Please keep this in mind. Conciliation is an action with the intent to bring peace and harmony. It is a placating action of appeasement intended to establish peace and therefore unity. Reconciliation is the reestablishment of that peace, harmony, and unity.

Let me make this perfectly clear. God has given us the responsibility to humbly act as a calming force of appeasement under all circumstances, while knowing that the reconciliation that will perfectly or completely restore friendly relationships, harmony, and unity can only come from God according to His will. As we all go through this, please keep in mind, our personal acts of conciliation are a one-way street, while always trusting God to affect reconciliation according to His will.

In this world, our conciliating efforts are not always going to prove to make things better for us, but may in fact cause us a great deal of pain and suffering even within the body of Christ.



**John 15:16-21** "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."

Even within the church, because all of us are battling the carnality of human nature, we may find ourselves in pain. But do we trust God? And are we willing to do the acts of conciliation that He requires of us with the hope of the reconciliation that can only come in Jesus Christ?

Please turn with me to a very good reminder scripture and a very concise statement from the apostle Paul regarding exactly who is doing the heavy lifting. Please turn with me to Philipians 1.

**Philippians 1:6** Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 1:9-11** And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

This, along with Romans 11:29, clearly states God finishes all His work He has started with the gifts He has given to each for our works of conciliation.

Down over in chapter 2. This a very important statement from Paul.

**Philippians 2:1-7** Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. [This is a one way street, brethren] Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. [I said one way street, but I meant it from the standpoint of the only one we can change is ourselves.] Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

That word "if" at the beginning of verse 1 is a poor translation. It is better translated "since" indicating that it is a done deal, not maybe. The Moffatt translation does a much better job with this. As James Moffatt translates chapter 2, verses 1-8:

**Philippians 2:1-8** (Moffatt) So by all the stimulus of Christ, by every incentive of love, by all your participation in the spirit, by all your affectionate tenderness, I pray you to give me the utter joy of knowing you are living in harmony, with the same feelings of love, with one heart and soul, never acting for private ends or from vanity, but humbly considering each other the better man, and each of with an eye to the interests of the others as well as to his own. Treat one another with the same spirit as you experience in Jesus Christ. Though he was divine by nature, he did not set store upon equality with God but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant; born in human guise and appearing in human form, he humbled stooped in his obedience even to die, and to die upon the cross.

Just as Christ used the very life He had in service to His creation, so too should we participate with Him to use the gifts He has given to be acting

with affectionate tenderheartedness and love that He has given to be humbly considering every man better than ourselves and always eagerly enduring the same rejection as Jesus Christ, if it is God's will. Knowing that we have done everything we could in faith to affect peace even when there was no reciprocation.

We cannot create the harmonious peace of reconciliation. Only God can do that. We can only perform the sometimes one-sided work of conciliation, waiting in trust for God to create the peaceful unity of reconciliation in all circumstances of life. The only ones we can change are ourselves as we use God's gifts to be more in line with Him as the salt of the earth and the lights within the house.

Please turn with me now to Matthew 5. As a matter of fact, this turned out to be part of what we heard in the Bible study last night. Matthew 5 and the famous Sermon on the Mount. I want you to understand, as you can see from the whole chapter, that Jesus' address is to those who have God's Holy Spirit driving them and live not only by the letter of the law, but the complete package of the Spirit of God's law of love. Although we know them well, we will be reading verses 1-16.

**Matthew 5:1-16** And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they

persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Please note that the first seven Beatitudes are individual, conciliatory attitudes and actions that build one another working from very real personal humility, contriteness, meekness, a driving desire to live God's Word in mercy, with single-minded focus on God to do whatever we can to maintain peace by living in accord with God's law of love.

However, even though these are things that we must do personally in outgoing concern, living the love of God is not always going to bring a peaceful life, but a life of suffering and persecution, as mentioned in the last two Beatitudes, just as it did for Jesus Christ. And just as it probably did from the Moabitess Ruth among the Israelites, a foreigner among the Israelites, and just as it probably did for Ittai, who was most likely seen as a foreign intruder into the leadership ranks by those vain men and those connivers like Joab.

You know, some commentaries that I read attributed Ittai's absence after II Samuel 18 to a speculation that he had died in defending David against Absalom's troops. But perhaps it even goes beyond that. Maybe he suffered death in battle at the hand of an envious Joab going all the way to death and devotion to David and his God. Mere speculation to be sure.

But what I hope we can see from this sermon is that our responsibilities toward one another and even toward the world must be personal, conciliatory actions and attitudes driven by God's Holy Spirit and His laws of love, no matter what the cost, while knowing that only God can affect true and lasting reconciliation for all men to Him and to one another.