

Return

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Date: 06 June 2018

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[0 : 00] Let's go ahead and read the entire first chapter.

So starting in verse 1 of Ruth chapter 1, it says, And they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt kindly with the dead and me.

The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

[2 : 12] If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you, For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you.

And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

[3 : 19] And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Marah, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

When we studied the first five verses, we talked about how leaving Bethlehem was quite an astonishing decision for Elimelech, because to leave the land which God had given to the nation was equivalent to deserting God.

God's presence was believed to be especially linked to the land. The tent of God probably was at Shiloh, and that was a testimony and a symbol that God was to be the God of the people in this land.

And we know that God had delivered the people from Egypt and brought them to the land as a special place for them to live. At first, though, it seemed like Elimelech had made a sensible choice, because while his kinsmen back home were suffering and hungry, there was food in Moab.

[4 : 35] So like the prodigal son in the story Jesus told later, Elimelech's stay in the far country went very well at the outset. He was able to support his wife and his two sons in comfort, and after a while, Moab became like home.

But you saw it starting in verse 3. Things took a turn for the worse. That's where it said, But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. And then in verse 5, her situation became really bleak.

It said, And both Malon and Kilion died, so that the woman was left alone without her two sons and her husband. So by now, she'd already accumulated a great load of personal grief. Her husband and her only sons had died before her time, in their time, and she was a stranger in a foreign land. So if the family name was going to carry on, there had to be an heir. But she had no sons, so she was left without any apparent hope. Also, her Moabitess daughters-in-law really offered no apparent means to an heir either. [5 : 39] And back in that day, no family likely meant no food. So picture where she is at this point. She's a stranger in a strange land. She's an aging single woman of no significance in a country that she's not even from.

And it's a family-oriented culture, and she has nobody really to care about her. So we talked last time we were in Ruth about how she'd hit rock bottom. And that's where we'll pick up the story tonight with the new material.

Naomi's response to hitting rock bottom is to go home or to return. We know that the Lord does not leave his people in adversity indefinitely.

There's an end to suffering for the believer, whether it comes here on earth or comes later on when we get to heaven. But suffering does not and will not gain victory over the Christian.

And I put this quote in your handout. It's from John Newton. He wrote the following in a letter to a member of his congregation who was undergoing affliction. He said, As we look at the remainder of chapter 1 tonight, we'll see evidence of the Great Shepherd's guidance, even though Naomi herself will fail to see it.

[7 : 23] Tonight's passage has three sections. The first and longest section covers verses 6 through 14. And in these verses, we see the departures.

So the departures is what we'll look at first. We'll take the verses in chunks. Look at verses 6 and 7 to start out. They say, The key word in this passage is return.

It's also rendered in the ESV as to turn, go, or bring back. And it actually shows up 12 times in the section that we're going to look at tonight.

We'll see it in verses 6 and 7 where we've already looked at it. It shows up in verse 8, 10, 11, 12. It shows up twice in verse 15. Also in verse 16, 21.

And twice again in verse 22. So that's why I titled this lesson, Return. Obviously, that's something that we need to get from this passage when a word keeps occurring over and over again.

[8 : 43] But four elements in these verses paint a picture of divine grace, even if we may not see it at first. The first thing is it was a gift from God that in the midst of her grief and pain, Naomi was able to hear good news.

And she heard the good news about the Lord visiting his people in Bethlehem. And that's actually the second thing. Then that was that God had intervened on behalf of his people.

And the original Hebrew word translated as visited in verse 6 bears a wide range of meanings. Sometimes it refers to a military context where it means to assemble, count, or muster men for battle.

But it's also common in theological context with God as the subject. And in these cases, it generally means to attend to or to visit. But this visitation can be either favorable or unfavorable.

In negative context, it means punishment. But here we see the positive context because here the word really means that God is intervening on behalf of his people and coming to the aid of his people.

[9 : 49] The third thing that gives us evidence of divine grace here is that the object of divine favor is identified as God's people.

So his people is the nation of Israel. And the return of range was a signal that God had not forgotten or rejected his people. And then finally, the fourth thing here that shows divine grace is that God had given his people the food that they needed.

So the good news from Bethlehem leads to the first departure documented in this section. And that's when Naomi decides to return home. And initially, she takes her two daughters-in-law with her.

So picture the scene here. We have the three women, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, beginning the trek to Bethlehem in Judah. And both daughters-in-law are dutiful at this point.

And they really demonstrate honor and proper respect to their mother-in-law. Naomi's hardship of being a widow and a sojourner is going to be the lot of her daughters-in-law if they stay with her.

[10:52] Because put yourself in their place. They're going to arrive in Israel as widows without male protection in a country that they're not from. So actually, Naomi's situation is going to reverse and become their situation when they get to Israel.

Having come to Moab as an alien herself, Naomi must have recognized from the outset the problems that her daughters-in-law would face if they accompanied her to Bethlehem. And she intended to spare them her grief. And she finally broke the silence with a conversation that continues to the end of this section. And her first speech offers a beautiful illustration of what we would call tough love today.

Because she combines firmness with tenderness. And she really is trying to convey a sense of urgency when she tells them to go. She actually says a double command at the start. She says, go, return. And look at verses 8 through 10 for Naomi's first speech and her daughter-in-law's response to it. Starting in verse 8, it said, But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, go, return each of you to her mother's house.

[12:03] May 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 of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

And they said to her, no, we will return with you to your people. So Naomi thought it far better for these women, and actually for her too, that her daughters-in-law should go back to their parents' house.

That way they wouldn't have to live on the charity of people in Bethlehem. They could live on the charity of their own people in Moab and perhaps have better fortune there. And maybe they might even find new husbands among their kinfolk in Moab.

And the firmness of Naomi's double command to Orpah and Ruth to return to their mother's house is matched by the tenderness that she expressed to them in a double blessing.

Because she begins by praying that God would demonstrate the same kindness toward them that they had demonstrated toward her. And really, when you think about it, this statement is remarkable for at least three reasons.

[13:09] Because first, she invokes the name of God when she addresses her Moabite daughters-in-law. And she apparently is assuming correctly that the authority of the God of Israel extended beyond the nation's borders into foreign territory.

And on the surface, the prayer appears to express deep faith in her God. Secondly, the blessing assumes that God is interested in the affairs of this family and can be called upon to deal favorably with these Moabites.

And in doing so, she really introduces a theological term in the book. And that's the term *hesed*. I'm sure most of you have heard that before. This word is translated kindly in verse 8.

But it really can't be fully translated with just one English word because it's a covenant term. It really wraps itself in all the positive attributes of God.

And it can include love, covenant faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness. You see it translated as kindness a lot. And loyalty. So, actually, it refers to acts of devotion and loving kindness that go beyond the requirements of duty.

[14:21] And divine acts of *hesed* would bring the opposite of the pain and grief that these women have been experiencing for at least a decade. And third, Naomi recognizes the acts of kindness that Orpah and Ruth have performed on behalf of the dead and on behalf of Ruth, or on behalf of Naomi, excuse me, in the past.

She says, with the dead and with me. And, of course, she's talking about her deceased husband, her two sons, and herself when she says that. So, really, she's talking about the kindness they've shown to all the Israelites in her family.

So, in her, she praises her daughters-in-law and she presents these Moabite women as models of the grace of God, actually. She holds out the possibility that human kindness may be answered in kind by divine action.

And she's assuming that the God of Israel actually cares about these Moabite women. So, how did the daughters-in-law respond when she told them to go back?

Well, initially, you see there, they insisted on returning with her. Both of them actually insisted on returning with her. And, in response, Naomi pointed out that she could not provide husbands for them.

[15 : 38] And, Naomi expressed concern for their happiness. And, we can see her love for them by the use of the personal words, my daughters, in verses 11 and 13.

She had come to think of these ladies as not just her daughters-in-law, but as her daughters. Now, look at verses 11 through 13 again. They say, but Naomi said, turn back, my daughters.

Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husband? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?

No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Notice that she starts out her speech with turn back.

[16 : 36] And, that really is an imperative expression in Hebrew. And, it really should be translated as strong advice. And, in some languages, maybe the closest equivalent would be you should go back.

And, Naomi challenges Ruth and Orpah's perception of reality by asking two rhetorical questions.

The first is actually a rebuke, which could be rephrased as, it is foolish for you to come with me.

You'll be much better off in your home country. And, the second question is even more pointed than that. The question may sound silly to us, but Naomi is deadly serious with it.

She assumes, rightly, that uppermost in her daughters-in-law's minds is remarriage. And, their chances of satisfaction in this respect are much better if they remain at home.

And, in the second phase of this speech, Naomi answers her own rhetorical question. First, she calls upon Orpah and Ruth to be realistic. She tells them that she is too old to remarry.

[17 : 38] Second, she tells them that even if she could marry and could bear sons, that her daughters-in-law wouldn't wait for them. Third, she answers her own question with an emphatic no when she asks, would you wait for sons if I could have them now?

So, Naomi's disposition toward her lot in life is really exposed there. She feels like she's the target of God's overwhelming power and wrath. So, she's really saying that the divine hand that struck Egypt with plagues, destroyed a generation of Israelites in the desert, and then punished the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan, was stretched out against her.

So, we may not have recognized the earlier famine in Bethlehem, and her family's exile in Moab, and the deaths of her husband and sons as punishment from God, but Naomi is clear about who she thinks is the cause of her troubles.

She makes it clear that she believes that the hand of God has gone out against her. So, earlier we talked about how it looked like Naomi was really doing a strong expression of faith, but think about what we're seeing here.

The same person who earlier implored God to be gracious to her daughters-in-law as they had been to her and to provide them with security in the house of new husbands turns around and accuses God of making her life bitter.

[18 : 59] So, instead of repenting for any sins of her own, she accuses God of being unjust toward her. You know, sometimes we can think that characters in the Bible are sometimes better or more spiritual than we are.

We actually should take comfort that the Bible shows us the flaws of people, because just a few verses earlier we were commending Naomi for seeing God's hand in things.

Now we're criticizing her for doing the same thing in a much less favorable circumstance. So, we should never use Bible characters' actions as justification for times when we fail to trust God, but it's nice to know that when we do fail to trust God, that we have evidence here in the Bible that despite the faults of God's people, God loves us anyway.

And the same thing applies to believers today, just like it did for Naomi. And if we go down to verse 14 now, we see the reaction to Naomi's second speech.

Verse 14 says, Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. So, I hope they had a lot of Kleenex with them, because they're doing a lot of crying in this chapter. It says, So, Orpah made the sensible choice and went back home.

[20 : 22] She looked at her situation in life clearly, and she made the necessary decisions about going back. She used exactly the same logic that Naomi had followed earlier, because the fields of Moab looked far greener than the land of Israel.

And so, she made the simple, sensible choice, and she marched off. She marched all the way out of the pages of the Bible, and that's the last we'll see of her here. But here was Ruth still.

And Ruth was a nobody. She was an outsider, a Moabite of all things. And we know there was nothing kosher about Ruth. She'd be about as welcome in Bethlehem as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah.

And she had to know that when she was thinking about going there. So, conventional wisdom shouted for Ruth to follow the way of Orpah. And that would be the most likely way of worldly security and significance.

But Ruth was not Orpah. There was nothing conventional about her. She wouldn't let Naomi go on alone to an empty future. And it says that Ruth clung to Naomi.

[21 : 28] And clung is the same verb that is used in Genesis 2.24 to describe the bond that exists in marriage. It's a word that describes loyalty to a covenant commitment.

So, Ruth was glued to her mother-in-law, and nothing and no one could send her away from that. And so, that brings us to the second section of the lesson.

We've seen the departures. Now we see two examples of the devotion. So, the devotion is the second thing we'll look at. Ruth will show us devotion to Naomi.

Ruth also will show us devotion to God. Listen to verses 15 through 18 again. Starting in verse 15, this is Naomi speaking.

It says, So, Ruth actually was chosen of God.

[22 : 58] She was the object of special grace. We might not see that yet, but that will become even more apparent as we get further into the book. Ruth's decision to return to Bethlehem with Naomi was more than an act of love to Naomi.

It was an act of faith in Naomi's God, the God of Israel. So, Ruth really is set out here as a picture of a true believer, because true faith endures trials and temptations, and it perseveres to the end.

And true faith cannot be destroyed. So, these three women, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, are examples both of what we should do and what we should not do. But, did you hear the resolve in Ruth's words?

Look at what she said again. She said, If you look at those statements one by one, each of them actually ratchets up her commitment one notch higher, because she's committing her life to Naomi, body and soul, for better or worse, for richer or for poorer, and in sickness and in health.

So, you can see why they use the same verb that they did to talk about marriage back in Genesis. And in doing so, she's also committing her life to Naomi's God, and she calls him as a witness by his personal name, the Lord.

[24 : 38] She's even willing to die and be buried in Naomi's land, which is also the land of Naomi's God, not the gods of the Moabites. So, given the intimate connection between land and God in the ancient Near East, the importance of a proper burial was thought of as key for a restful afterlife.

So, Ruth was actually making the ultimate commitment she could make in the ancient world. And she further binds herself to do this with an oath. She says that if she reneges on her promise, she invites the Lord, Naomi's God, to stretch out his hand to strike her down.

So, it's an astonishing act of surrender and self-sacrifice. So, Ruth was laying down her life to serve Naomi. So, if we hadn't already read Naomi's response to Ruth's speech, how might you expect Naomi to respond to Ruth's words?

You would think after that heartfelt speech that Ruth might, or Naomi might thank Ruth for being so devoted to her and being so devoted to God, because after all, she's going to have someone to watch out for her in Bethlehem.

But look at how verse 18 describes Naomi's reaction. It says, And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

[25 : 59] And her reaction is bad. And in the original Hebrew, her reaction is even worse than the English translation makes it seem. Because, literally, the original Hebrew says, When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.

So, here you have Ruth pouring out her heart to Naomi about how devoted she's going to be to Naomi and Naomi's God.

And Ruth has listened to one of the most emotionally moving speeches in the whole Bible. And Naomi made no other response except a hard silence. In other words, she gave her the cold shoulder.

So, these had to be far from welcome words. And it really shows just how bitter Naomi was. She had nothing positive to say to the outpouring of love and devotion that Ruth had given to her. And, you know, we might wonder at this point if Ruth turned around to see if she could still catch up with Orpah, because that might make you wonder whether you were really making the right decision.

[27 : 03] So, so far, we have seen the departures and the devotion. In the last section we'll look at tonight, we'll see the dismay. So, the dismay is the last thing we'll see.

We'll see dismay from bitter Naomi. And we'll see dismay from the townspeople. So, listen to verses 19 through 21 again. So, the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi.

Call me Marah, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

The remainder of the journey to Bethlehem is summarized in one short statement in the first part of verse 19. And then the reader's attention is quickly drawn to a new scene at a new location with new characters coming in.

[28 : 12] So, look at the stir that their arrival caused. It says it caused a stir throughout the whole town. And the nature of the response is captured effectively with that word, which translated was stirred in English.

And the words relate to the original, and they bear a wide range of meanings. And it means to hum, groan, be agitated, panic, be in an uproar, or to make noise.

So, you can imagine all of the chatter and side conversations that must have been going on as Naomi and Ruth wandered into Bethlehem. And no doubt, Naomi's relatives had heard of the grief that she'd experienced since her husband and her sons had left the town and headed for Moab more than ten years ago.

So, certainly, her relatives that were still in Bethlehem had to have some level of excitement to know that she suddenly showed up again, unannounced. But then, when they see the toll that the years of grief and deprivation had taken on her, they see that the one who left Bethlehem is Naomi, which means the pleasant one, had returned as a haggard and destitute old woman who was obviously very bitter.

And look at the question that the women ask at the end of verse 19. It hints at how different Naomi must have looked because it says, the women said, is this Naomi? Naomi? So, you know how it is if you haven't seen somebody in a while and you're trying to figure out if that really is the person you think it is.

[29 : 41] And, of course, we know that Naomi didn't have any way to send pictures to them, probably. So, they're trying to figure out if that really was her. And so, you know, they're really shocked and dismayed at how she looked.

If you thought I might have been too hard on Naomi for her response to Ruth's speech in the last section, look how she responds to the women's question here in this section.

Verse 20 says, So, she's really giving public airing to her years of frustration and pain here.

She demands a new name. She may have left Bethlehem as Naomi, but she's returned as a different person. And from now on, they must call her Mara.

And you know what Mara means? Mara actually means bitter, yes. So, she's reminding people how bitter she is every time she asks them to call her by that name.

[30 : 53] So, the depth of Naomi's bitterness is reflected in her outburst at the end of verse 20 and verse 21. And really, when you look at it, the exclamation involves four accusations leveled against God.

And he's referred to by his title or name four times in these verses. And so, if the words translated went away full are understood to be in terms of food and satisfied stomachs, the first statement is patently false because if they went away full when they left Bethlehem, they would have had no reason to leave in the first place.

They would have stayed in Israel. But if went away full is understood by what she likely means as being full in terms of family and descendants, the statement is true because when she left, she was securing her husband and her future was secured by her two sons.

But now she has none of those things. Even if we may be inclined to give Naomi's attitude the benefit of the doubt, verse 21 really shatters a positive interpretation because she places the blame for her present destitution squarely on God.

She may have come back home in faith, but hers is a flawed faith. She's really unable to see that humans might have played a part in Israel's famine and in her own trials.

[32 : 17] So, the woman that the neighbors greet is indeed a bitter old woman. She ascribes sovereignty to God, but this is sovereignty, as she describes it, as sovereignty without grace, power without compassion, and a judge without mercy.

And in a world where a woman's security was found in her husband and her future was determined by her sons, Naomi stands alone except for this Moabite who's chosen to cast her lot with her.

Verse 22 is somewhat of a postscript, but it sets the scene for what we'll cover the next time we're in Ruth. Verse 22 says, So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

So let's talk about what we can learn from these verses tonight. In the first place, it addresses us as people who are just like Orpah and Ruth.

Because like Orpah and Ruth, there was nothing kosher about us when we were born. On the contrary, we were outsiders to the gospel, and we were outsiders of grace, and we know that we were by nature objects of God's wrath, even if we grew up in a Christian home.

[33 : 35] We know that we were dead in our transgressions and sins, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2.1, and we all need a new birth to be born of the Spirit, as Jesus told Nicodemus, so that we could enter the kingdom of God.

So we're all faced with a crucial choice at some part in our lives, and that's a dividing of the ways. We can continue to seek security and significance by going the world's way, and that's exactly what Orpah did, or we can seek to find meaning and value in our career, our families, our health, and our wealth, and that's part of going the world's way.

But alternatively, we can choose the way of Ruth. And up to a point, Orpah's approach to life may work. It may initially grant us everything we ask of it, and we don't know what happened to Orpah. Perhaps she met Mr. Right when she went back to Moab. Maybe she had a pack of children and lived happily ever after. And many people today who choose not to follow God appear to have life work out relatively well, too.

They get, in reasonable measure, what they've sought. But in the process of pursuing the Moabite option, Orpah missed out on the one thing that's of true value in life, and that's a living relationship with the Lord, the one true God.

[34 : 53] She chose with her eyes, just as Naomi and Elimelech had done earlier, she opted for the way of the world instead of the way of faith. Whether she found what she was looking for in Moab or not, she failed to find friendship with Israel's God, the only God that there is.

And so the saddest part of Orpah's story is that she probably never even knew what she was missing. The other way we could go, though, is we can follow Ruth's pattern and choose the gospel, and that gives us a way to true life.

We know a lot of times that the gospel is a dawning path that can be taken only by faith and can be taken only by throwing ourselves on the mercy and favor of Israel's God.

We also know that as outsiders, we have nothing to offer God except our emptiness. Ruth, in our verses tonight, embraced that emptiness, and she trusted that Naomi's God would be her God also. And this road is a hard road, and it passes through the way of the cross. The gospel road, in one sense, is the easiest path in the world because we have to bring nothing to it except our own need.

[36 : 05] But in another sense, it's the hardest path because the cross is a continual stumbling block to anyone who wants to bring anything to contribute to his own salvation.

The way of the cross means constantly dying to self-interest and putting the needs and desires of others first, whether or not their response is of gratitude and thanks. And that's exactly what Ruth faced in our story tonight.

She put herself out there for Naomi, and Naomi acted like she didn't even care and perhaps was even put out that Ruth wanted to come with her. We also know that the way of the cross means pouring out our lives for others, even in the face of their bitterness of spirit at times.

And during the last half of the lesson, we saw Naomi's actions in a bad light. And, you know, maybe one of the things that puts Naomi's actions in a bad light that we haven't talked about yet is that she didn't really seem too concerned about the spiritual condition of her daughters-in-law.

She told them to go back to their gods. You know, if she really had faith in Israel's gods, she should be telling them, come with me, even though it may be hard.

[37 : 18] We know the true God, and he will take care of us somehow. But instead, she let them go her own way, at least tried to let them go their own way. One of them did. And one of them has chosen the right path.

But we can be a lot like Naomi, too. Because when the circumstances of life go badly for us, it's real easy to be tempted to think that God is out to get us.

And when life is hard, even when the difficulties are a direct result of our own sin, we swiftly attribute our pain and loss to the harshness of God's wrath. And it's very easy to ask God why he's letting that happen to me.

So whether it's closed doors in our career, whether it's financial difficulties, or shattered relationships, our first resort is often to blame God for the harshness and pain that we have.

And the result of that attitude in our hearts may be that our lives become filled with such bitterness that we completely miss the providential marks of God's continuing goodness to us, even in the midst of those difficulties.

[38 : 20] Like Naomi, we may be so busy complaining about our emptiness that we miss the fact that God has emptied our hands only to fill them with something so much better a little bit later on.

Whether she realizes it or not, right now, the gospel is the fundamental answer to Naomi's need.

And the gospel is the fundamental answer to our need as well.

Ruth is simply a pointer to the gospel in this story. She's a small symbol of God's grace that pointed Naomi to the great symbols of God. So when we're tempted to feel sorry for ourselves because of how God has dealt with us, consider how God dealt with his own son to redeem us for our sins against God.

You know, though we have gone astray like Naomi in search of bread that does not satisfy, God didn't cut us off in his anger and give us the wrath that we deserved.

He justly could have dealt bitterly with us, but instead he poured out his wrath on Christ on the cross. And 2 Corinthians 5:21 puts it the most succinctly. That verse says, of course, for our sake, he, meaning God, made him to be sin, talking about Jesus, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[39 : 38] Naomi may not see that yet tonight, but as we get further into the story, she will. So with that, let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you that you put stories in the Bible that speaks so much to not only how people behaved back then, but how people still behave today.

When we go through difficulties in life, let us find encouragement from what we read here that even though it may look like it on the surface, you're not abandoning your people to deal with these difficulties on their own.

Instead, you're actually using those difficulties to draw us closer to you. Help us to have more faith when we face struggles, and temptations, and help us be pointers to you for others that we see dealing with struggles themselves.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.