

EVERYDAY FAITH: "The Road Back, Part 2"

INTRODUCTION

- **Key Idea:** In this passage, we find Naomi **returning** to Bethlehem after living ten years in the land of Moab.

The word **return** is used 12 times in Ruth chapter 1. It is used of someone making a physical journey back to a point of departure. It is also used also as a word to describe someone who is returning back to God after disobedience (e.g. book of Hosea).

Last Week's Message:

1. The **Path** (Ruth 1:6-7): Naomi's desperation *pushed* her towards home; but the graciousness of God also *pulled* her to Bethlehem.
2. The **Parting** (Ruth 1:8-15): Naomi encourages her daughters-in-law to return home. This is a selfless act on the part of Naomi.
3. The **Pledge** (Ruth 1:16-18): Ruth uses covenant language to express *chesed* to Naomi.

These are the first words of Ruth in the text. This is the first time we hear her speaking and it's a confession of faith. It's against all rationality. Faith is produced as a gift of God.

THE PAIN (RUTH 1:19-21)

1. The Bitterness

- Naomi says to the women of Bethlehem, "Call me Mara" (1:20). In the Hebrew, Naomi means "pleasant"; Mara means "bitter."
- There is **raw emotion** here: Naomi expresses her disappointment with God.

Naomi is still **dealing with God**. This is like the Psalms of Lament where people share their complaints and their struggles with God. The Bible invites us to do that.

2. The Balance

- Naomi not only recognizes that the hand of God seems to have gone out against her (1:20-22) but she also makes note of the heart of God and confesses a belief in His kindness (1:8-9).

Naomi is baffled but still believing. She is struggling but still standing. She is hurting but still hoping she is grumbling but still grappling. She is wobbling but still walking. That's an encouragement for any of us who are struggling to understand the providence of God.

3. The Big Picture

- **Troubles tend to narrow our perspective.** All Naomi could see was the hand of God had gone out against her.
- The book of Ruth moves to a great conclusion: a genealogy which leads us to King David.
- In **2 Samuel 7:15-16**, God makes a covenant with David that his throne will last forever, which anticipates the coming of Jesus Christ.

"None of us know enough to say that God doesn't know what He's doing." (Dale Ralph Davis)

"If we live long enough and God is gracious enough, we'll be able to understand that the seat of our adversity is the very ground of our prosperity." (De Courcy).

Sermon Application Questions

May 24, 2020

PERSONAL RESPONSES

Pastor Philip encouraged us to think through the wonder of Ruth's confession of faith in 1:16-18.

- There's no **economic advantage** because she's in the same boat with a widow as a widow.
- There's no **social advantage** because she's leaving her home.
- There's no **racial advantage** because Moabites were the natural born enemies of Israel
- There's no **psychological advantage** because Naomi's life is bitter.
- There's no **religious advantage** because Naomi, a God-fearing woman has lost her husband.

From a human perspective, Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and the God of Israel is irrational and unexplainable. Yet it points to the truth that faith is the gift of God.

Do you ever say to yourself "I cannot believe that I have come to believe?" Take a moment to thank God for the gift of faith.

In his book, *Rejoicing in Lament*, Todd Billings makes this following observation:

"It is precisely out of trust that God is sovereign that the psalmist repeatedly brings laments and petitions to the Lord. . .If the psalmists had already decided the verdict—that God is indeed unfaithful—they would not continue to offer their complaint."

Have you ever found yourself "dealing with God" in bitter circumstances as Naomi does in Ruth chapter 1?

How have the Psalms of Lament brought you comfort in your time of struggle?

DIGGING DEEPER

Take some time and reflect on some of the key passages related to this week's sermon. Ask the Lord for help in making application of these truths to your life.

Psalm 13:1-2

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Psalm 25:16-21

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. Oh guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem Israel, O God, out of his troubles.

Psalm 74:1-2

O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt.

Read **Ruth 1:8-9** and compare it with **Ruth 1:19-22**.

Have you ever struggled with understanding God's kindness (1:8-9) on one hand, while experiencing the bitterness of life (1:20-22) on the other hand?

2

Pastor Philip explained:

"Naomi is baffled but still believing. She is struggling but still standing. She is hurting but still hoping she is grumbling but still grappling. She is wobbling but still walking. That's an encouragement for any of us who are struggling to understand the providence of God."

How does Naomi's experience speak to our struggles today?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1

An inquirer wrote John Newton a letter, saying he was more disposed to cry "Misery" than "Hallelujah," and Newton wrote him back and said, "Why not both together? When the treble is praise and heart humiliation for the bass, the melody is pleasant and the harmony is good."

What are the things that cause us to cry "Hallelujah" even in the midst of sorrowful circumstances?

How can we express the sweet harmony of praise and lament in our prayers to the Lord?

2

Dale Ralph Davis has said:

"None of us know enough to say that God doesn't know what He's doing."

Take a moment to pray for someone in your small group or someone in the church who is doing through difficult circumstances. Ask the Lord to strengthen their faith.

Perhaps write them a kind note or word of encouragement this week and let them know that you are praying for them.