

Where You Go, I Will Go; Ruth 1:1-18

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This is one of the most beloved stories of our Bibles. And not only that, this is widely recognized as one of the great literary classics of humankind. This is one of the greatest works that humans have produced in terms of a story. And it is a touching story that grabs at our heartstrings. Oftentimes we think of the story of Ruth as a love story.

The Bible's version of a Cinderella tale even begins in the Bible's version of Once Upon a Time. And ends in the Bible's version of they lived happily ever after. And between the beginning and the end there we find a young girl, a young maid, so to speak, who is destitute or on the verge of destitution, and along comes her prince and rescues her.

And that's often the way that the book of Ruth is understood, and all those things are true. This is a love story. This is a story of a rescue, but that is not the main point whatsoever. It's not even close. It's not even the secondary point. The story of Ruth is a story that is mature, In its theological teaching, it is refined and indeed not light in the theological truths that will be presented to us in the story of Ruth.

Among the themes that we will encounter as we spend the next, let's say, about six weeks in the book of Ruth, among the themes that we'll encounter are the themes of the significance and the importance of the covenant community of God. The theme of God's plan to graft into the covenant people. Gentiles, particularly Gentile women, to be grafted into the covenant people of God.

The theme of famine and how famine is often a judgment of God, but famine more times than not is a means that God uses to move his people from one place to another. We think of Abraham more than once, was moved from one place to another by means of a famine. His son, Isaac, same thing. The nation of Israel was moved to Egypt by means of a famine.

So God often uses famines, to relocate his people to a place that he would like them to be. We're also going to see, of course, the plight of widows in the ancient world, which is always a prominent theme in the scriptures. And it will be a, of course, a theme front and center in the scriptures, the plight of widows in the ancient world, because we're going to find in the very first chapter, three of them.

Also, we'll see the theme of faith, true and genuine faith. And we'll also see the theme of the faithfulness of God, the faithfulness of God towards his people. We will see also the theme of the reality of living in a fallen world. We will also see the themes, the two major themes, I would call them, the two central themes of the book are, first of all, the preservation of the seed of promise, which we've talked about on many occasions before, which is one of the grand themes, if not the grand theme of the Old Testament.

Which there this, there's this theme that there's the seed. The seed will come and the seed will crush the head of the serpent. But on almost every turn of the Old Testament, that seed or the line of the seed is very nearly extinguished. It's very nearly lost. So many occasions come up through our Old Testaments.

We won't recount them now, but so often these occasions come up in which the promised seed, the line of the seed, is nearly cut off. And none of those instances are greater than, of course, the story of Ruth, where the promised seed is nearly cut off. Not born, but we'll see that theme and then of course the central theme of the book is the theme of God's providence but this is not the theme of God's providence as you might expect because God's providence as presented to us in the story of Ruth is Unique to the scriptures nowhere else in the scriptures Will you find God's providence presented in such a way as it's presented in the story of Ruth?

It's a unique little book for us It's the only book in the Old Testament that's named after a Gentile female. We know that there's, of course, two books in our Old Testaments named after females. Ruth and, of course, Esther. Esther was Jewish, though. There are a couple of books in our New Testaments that are named after Gentiles.

Luke. And of course, Timothy, but the only book in all of our scripture named after a Gentile woman is the book that's named after Ruth. But what we'll find as we walk through the story is Ruth is not the central character, nor is she even the second most central character. She plays third fiddle in the terms of characters.

And the, the author says more about two other characters, namely Boaz and Naomi. He says more about them. We have more information about both of them and they both have more dialogue than does Ruth. So the story is not about Ruth as the central character, yet it's named after her. Just a couple of words here about, just the background of the, of the book, and then we'll get started.

This is customary for us as we begin a new story, just to know a little bit about how it comes to us. We don't know who book, who wrote the book of Ruth. Nor do we know when the book of Ruth was written. The only thing that we can surmise is that it was written at least by the time of David. And we know that by means of the fact that the end of the book ends with the genealogy that leads up to David.

And the only way the author could know the genealogy leading up to David was if David was already born. So it takes place. It's written at least by the time David was on the scene, perhaps even later. As far as who wrote it, the best guess would be Samuel. But that's purely a guess. We have no idea who wrote it, whether it was a man or a woman, but in either case, we find that the book of Ruth is a tremendously well-preserved book for us.

We are leaving, we're pausing, I should say, in our study through the book that is, I guess it holds the distinction of the book of our New Testament that has the most textual variance. We talked about that a couple, on a couple of occasions, the textual variance in Mark, and we've wrestled through many of those.

So now we go to the opposite end of the spectrum and we find that the book of Ruth is probably the most well-preserved book of our Bibles. Oftentimes we might think about the, what's called the Masoretic Text. I don't know if you've ever heard about the Masoretic Text, but the Masoretic Text is a body of Old Testament scriptures that dates to about a thousand A.

D. The Masoretic Text was the basis for the King James Translation, but then sometime afterwards, around the middle of the 20th century, there was the discovery of the Dead Sea

Scrolls, the Qumran texts, and the discovery of those scrolls gave us access to the same books of the Old Testament that were a thousand years older.

So it might be interesting for you to hear that between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text a thousand years later, there is exactly one textual variant in the entire book of Ruth. That comes in chapter 3 and verse 14. In which the Masoretic text has the word feet as plural and the Qumran text has the word foot as singular.

And that is the only textual variant in the entire book over more than a thousand year period. So it's an extremely well preserved book for us. But all that being said, that's enough to say about the manuscripts and the books and the author and the date and those sorts of things. Now, let's talk about Just simply jump in to the story.

Let's begin by reading our story. We'll cover today the first 18 verses, and we'll begin this morning by reading those verses together. From verse 1, In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab. He and his wife and his two sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives from the name of the one who was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth.

They lived there ten, about ten years, and both Malon and Chilion died. So that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters in law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food.

So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters in law, 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 he have dealt with, 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. 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 if I should say I have hope even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you, 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 will I 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. I wonder if I might tease your imagination just a bit this morning and have you imagine with me a field.

Just an ordinary, regular field. In this case, it would be a barley field growing a harvest of barley. And this field is early in the morning. There's still some mist coming up from the field. But as you look in your imagination and you see this field, You see that there are workers who are harvesting the barley crop.

And as you watch these workers harvesting the barley crop and they're tying it together in sheaves and stacking the sheaves, as you look closer you also notice some women, some poor women. You know they're poor because their clothes are ragged and faded and worn out, their hair is disheveled, and they're rather dirty.

But these women are going behind the workers and they're picking up the pieces that the workers have dropped. They're going to the corners of the field and they're taking some barley that was left in the very corners of the field and they're taking it and holding it close to their breast and then leaving with it.

And as you watch this scene unfold, now the scene fades, and the next scene fades in. The next scene takes place in the very same field, some thousand years later, only now the scene is in the late afternoon. And as you watch this scene from afar, you can tell it's the same field, but there's a completely different thing going on now.

For now, there's a strange sight. It's the sight of seven brothers standing over to one side along with their father with a rather concerned, odd look on their face. But then closer to you, you see a man whom you can tell is a very important man. He's distinguished in the way that he holds himself. He's distinguished in the way that he is dressed.

He looks to you to be a priest. He looks to you to be a person of authority. And at his feet is a teenage boy. Kneeling, and this man is pouring oil into the hair of this teenage boy, and he's placing his hands on the boy, and he's speaking some words, all the while the seven brothers and the father are looking on in complete and utter disbelief.

Now that scene fades, and the next scene fades in, and it's the very same field. Now, yet another thousand years later. But only now it takes place at night. You see the field at night, and in this field now there's a flock of shepherd, of sheep, and those sheep are being herded and cared for by some shepherds.

The shepherds have maybe ended their day. They're gathered around a campfire, and they're joking and laughing at the things that shepherds laugh and joke about. And as they're gathered around the campfire in the dark of the night, you witness the entire field lit up in brilliant light. And the shepherds fall to their feet or fall to their knees gazing up into the sky.

And you hear these voices, these angelic non-human voices saying to these shepherds, Fear not, fear not, for your Savior is born to you in the city of Bethlehem. You see, this field is a field in the

region of Bethlehem. And in our imaginations, we imagine it to be the very same place. We don't know that.

There's no reason that it's not the very same field, for it certainly is the very same region that all three of these events take place. But it's the first of those events that we'll turn our attention to now, the event that took place some 2,000 years prior to the last event, the angelic voices. And that's the event that we turn our attention to now.

So look with me now in verse 1. In the days when the judges ruled. That's perhaps the most important, or one of the most important, phrases in the book. Because that phrase sets the context for us. It sets the scene, tells us when the story took place, the days when the judges ruled. So, the judges, the period of the judges, this tells us what was happening in the world of Ruth and Naomi and Elimelech, as these events took place.

The period of the judges was Without a doubt, one of the most tumultuous, chaotic, and violent periods in Israel's history. Second only to the period around the life of Elijah, the period at which the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had reached the low point. They had spiraled down to the lowest point, and King Ahab and all that, remember that story?

That would take the cake, so to speak, of the lowest point in Israel's spiritual history. But second to that, a close second to that, would be the period of the Judges. So what happened in the period of the judges was Israel, of course, they had Moses and Moses was their leader and Moses led them for 40 years and then Moses died.

Well, then God raises up Joshua and Joshua turns out to be a supernaturally anointed leader, a supernaturally anointed general who takes them into the promised land and they defeat the people of the promised land with unparalleled success. The walls of Jericho crumble as they merely shout. The waters of the Jordan stop as they walk across the banks of the Jordan without even getting their sandals muddy.

Armies that are far bigger and stronger and better trained and better equipped run in the face of them. All these supernatural events lead to the conquest of the land. And now Israel is on this high, so to speak. But then, Joshua dies. and they're left once again leaderless. Then we enter the period of the judges.

The period of the judges was a decadent period financially, economically. It was a decadent period from a period of great civil unrest, a period of tremendous, tremendous violence. During the period of judges, where that story that we're all familiar with, Most likely we're familiar with in any case was the story of the man who was traveling with his concubine And he stops over for the night and his concubine sleeps outside while he sleeps inside Well some men come and they abuse the concubine So violently all night long that she dies at the break of day and the man is so angry that he Dismembers her into many pieces and sends a piece of her into each region of the land of Israel That's That's the type of thing that the story of Judges is about.

Judges is the only book of the Bible that I've ever preached through, that about two thirds of the way through, the people to whom I was preaching came to me and said, We really appreciate the things that you're showing us in the book of Judges, but we will be glad when this is over because this is so violent.

It is the most violent book of the Old Testament. And that's the period of life that the judges occupied. And so Joshua now is off the scene, but then God raises up these judges, these deliverers, these redeemers. And there are many that occur in the story of judges. Some of them are well known, Gideon, Samson, Deborah, many others are less well known, but the point is that there were many of them and they all are raised up by God, To deliver the people in a certain situation in a certain time, and then they leave the scene.

And so we go from Moses to Joshua to now judge after judge after judge after judge. If there's one thing that's clear to the people is we need a king who will stay. We need a king who will come and not leave us. We need to come. We need a king who will come and deliver us and keep us delivered. And throughout the entire chaotic, tumultuous period of the Judges.

This is the sense, the sense in which Israel's neighbors continue to commit violence against them, to come and steal their crops, to come and steal their women, to come and murder them and brutally treat them. And throughout this entire period, Israel is becoming more and more spiritually decadent. We see that phrase.

In fact, if you were to look, If you're in a pew Bible, if you look at the, just the previous page, but even your, your own Bible, you look at the very last verse of the book of Judges. The very last verse before the beginning of the story of Ruth. And you'll see that phrase repeated four times. There was no king in Israel.

And then three of those times, it's repeated, it's followed by the next phrase. And everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Ruth is a story that takes place because someone did what was right in their own eyes. That gives rise to the entire story of Ruth, because this was the time in which people were doing what was right in their own eyes.

But throughout this incredibly spiritually tumultuous season, this time of incredible spiritual darkness, I don't know if you can relate to this, I don't know if you can sense a parallel between our time and theirs, a time in which It seems so chaotic, and the future seems so uncertain, and we seem so unsure, not only about where we're going, but where we came from.

I don't know if you can see the parallels between now and the time of the judges, but if you can't, you might want to go home this afternoon and read the story of Judges, and you will see that that is a story about a period of time that is so much like ours that it's stunning. But in the midst of that story comes the Bible's most beautiful story, much in the same way as a diamond looks more beautiful on the backdrop of the black velvet cloth.

You know, when you go to the jewelry store, they don't just take out the diamond and show you the diamond. They put that little black velvet cloth down so that they put the diamond on that so that the diamond who, which in and of itself is beautiful, looks far more beautiful on a dark background. The same sort of effect takes place in the story of Ruth.

It's easy to read the story of Ruth and just think that we're reading this Cinderella story that starts tragically, but everything's going to work out in the end. It's easy to lose sight of what's going on in the world around Ruth. And around Naomi during this entire story, in the time, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

So already were two phrases into the book and we've now experienced two tragedies. The first tragedy is that we live in this period of the Judges, the most spiritually despotic period of within a thousand years of the nation of Israel. And not only the tragedy of living in such a time of spiritual wandering and spiritual aimlessness, there was a famine in the land.

Famines are often God's means of bringing judgment onto people. And we don't know if the famine was the direct result of God withholding rains, or perhaps the indirect result of God sending the Midianites or the Moabites in to conquer them and steal their crops as they often did. We don't know. But there was a famine in the land, and that's also something that's easy to pass over.

Because one thing is true, and one thing that everyone in the room can agree with, is you have no idea what a famine is about, and neither do I. None of us. We don't have the first clue about what a famine is like because we've never modern man is so or at least modern Western man is so removed from the idea of a famine that we find it even it's something that we cannot even relate to.

What do you do when you're hungry? You get food. You go to the supermarket and what's in the supermarket? Shelves of food. And it's always been that way your whole life. Even in that crazy covid time when there were some empty shelves. There was still plenty of food. You have no idea, neither do I, what it's like to hear your children cry because their stomach hurts from emptiness and literally have nothing to give them to put into it and no idea when you will get something because you will not get any food.

Until the rains come and you have no idea when the rains are coming. And that was something of life in the ancient world. Famine was a reality and it was a harsh reality. Throughout the story there's going to be two, two characters that we can be, that will be very easy for us to heap blame upon.

Elimelech and Naomi. But the fact of the matter is we weren't there. We didn't hear our children crying and no food to put into their mouth. We didn't experience the fearfulness of not having anything for the next meal and no idea when we would get anything for the next meal. But there's this famine now, this double tragedy in the land.

This famine was in the land and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab. There's the third tragedy. We aren't even finished with the first verse and we've now been faced with three tragedies. Number one, they're living in this time of spiritual aimlessness. Number two, there's a famine in the land.

Now, we're going to go, this family is going to go to find some food and we want to cry out, don't go to Moab. Wherever you go, don't go there. Because if we're familiar at all with the story of the Judges, we're familiar with the fact that the Moabites were Israel's sworn enemy. They were the most hated enemy of ancient Israel.

It would be tantamount to, most of us in the room can, can remember what life was like in the seventies and eighties. Remember in the seventies and eighties, Can you imagine if someone would have said to you, you know, I just really don't like the way things are going here. I think I'm going to move to the Soviet Union.

You get a sense of what that would have been like to have heard those words, to move to our arch enemy? Don't go to Moab. Go anywhere but Moab. We're reminded of the fact that the Moabite people were God's sworn enemies from the very beginning. Their very beginnings were the beginnings of moral Back from Genesis chapter 19.

Remember the story of Lot, Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of the city. And then Lot and his family leave the city. Lot's wife looks back, turns into a pillar of salt. So Lot's, Lot and then his two daughters go into the cave. And in the cave, The two daughters, the eldest daughter says to the younger daughter, let us get our, this is in your notes, I won't read it for you, but let us get our father drunk and lay with him so that our seed can continue, so that our lineage can continue, so that we might not be extinct.

And so they do this. The first one is the eldest daughter and she conceives and brings forth the second daughter. And he becomes the father of the Moabite people, a people born from sexual perversion, sexual deviancy, a people born from immorality that is disgusting to us. That was the birth of these people.

They became known in the ancient world, the Moabite women became known for their sexual perversion, for their sexual looseness. People would say, all the loose women, they live in Moab. All the Moabite women, they're the loose women. If you want some loose women, go over there to Moab. That was the reputation that they had.

We find in Numbers chapter 21, we find that we're told that the Moabite women seduced the Israelite men to sin with them, and then sinning with them to also worship their gods as well. We find God's words against them in Deuteronomy. Saying, because the Moabites would not help my people as they were crossing the land, have nothing to do with them.

No Moabite is to ever enter the assembly of God's people to the 10th generation. Interestingly, scholars have dated Ruth to the 11th generation of that generation that God spoke against. But that's another story altogether. So the Moabite people, we want to say to to Elimelech, not there. Go anywhere else but Moab, don't go to God's sworn enemies of people.

But yet they went to sojourn in the country of Moab. He and his wife and his two sons. Verse two, the name of the man was Elimelech. So here we come across the first irony. The book of Ruth is a masterful work of literature. And for most of its mastery, we're going to struggle a little bit to see it because we're, of course, not reading it in Hebrew, but we'll try to understand what we can.

Much of it also can be seen even in the English because it is truly a masterful work of literature. But here we come across one of the first literary devices the author uses, irony. And he uses it very unsparingly. The name of the man was Elimelech. The man's name has a meaning. In fact, all the names in the book of Ruth have spiritual meaning.

The name of the meaning of the name Elimelech is my God is King. You can see it there. El, that's the word for God, the Hebrew word for God, such as King. El should I, God almighty. L is the word for God. We've talked recently about the pronoun or about the, I sound at the end how that makes it possessive.

Eli means not God, but my God. So Eli, as a name means my God, or God is mine. And then the word *melech* is the word, the Hebrew word for king. So my God is king. Ironically, he's the one person in

the story that is not acting like. God is the king of the land because he's leaving the land of promise the land in which God has promised to provide for his people the land in which God's presence is most distinctly known, most tangibly known.

Elimelech is going to leave the man whose very name means my God is king is the one who acts like his God is impotent. So the name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife, Naomi, we might know that name to mean sweet. There's probably a footnote in your Bible saying that's the name of, or the meaning of the name Naomi is sweet or pleasant and the name of his wife, Naomi, the names of his two sons were Malon are both close derivatives of words that mean something close to puny and piney.

Now, that explains something to us of the foolishness of Elimelech's decision to go to Moab, because anybody who would decide to name his sons Puny and Piney, it's not surprising at all to us that he would decide to go to Moab in a famine. So, you know, you can just imagine the scenario, the firstborn son is there and the, and the nursemaid comes.

You were, you're the father of a, of a baby boy. Let's name him puny. And then let's name the next one piney. But as it all works out to be, they of course proved themselves to be puny and piney as they die in young age. So they were told next that they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. Now Bethlehem, the city of Bethlehem, previously to be known as Bethlehem was known as Ephrathah.

So we see there the root of Ephrathites. So this tells us that they were Bethlehemites or Ephrathites long before. They weren't newcomers. They, that was where their clan, that was where their family had, had its roots for generations and generations and generations. So they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem and Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. Did you catch the subtle change in language? Because in verse one is described to us that they went to Judah, or they went in Judah, over to Moab to sojourn, you know what that word sojourn means that word sojourn specifically means to go to a place.

Temporarily, to go to a place for a time. A sojourner is one who has gone into a foreign land for a temporary period of time. So they go to Moab to sojourn, but the very next verse is They remain there. They live there. So as they're leaving, we can just hear the conversations. Elimelech is saying to mom and dad, don't worry.

We're going to ride this famine out in Moab three months, four months, six months tops. We'll be back within six months. Don't worry. This isn't goodbye. We'll just be back in just a few months. We're going to ride out the worst part of this. We'll get some food over there in Moab. We'll be back here. This will even help you because there'll be less mouths here to feed.

The food here is so limited. You'll have to stretch it less. So we'll just go here just, just for a short time. And then we'll be back. Little did he know. He would never see Israel again little did he know that he would spend the rest of his life in Moab because that is the nature of sin the departure from the land of promise to flee the famine into the land of the idolatrous Moabites is seen as sinful in the Old Testament context.

And so that is the nature of sin. Sin always, it's been said sin always takes you farther than you wanted to go, keeps you there longer than you want it to stay and cost you more than you wanted to pay. I don't know who first coined that phrase. The first time I think I've seen it was from the lips of Robbie Zacharias, but a number of people have used that phrase because it's It's so helpful because it is so true.

Sin takes you farther than you want it to go. It keeps you there longer than you want it to stay, and it costs you more than you want it to pay. That's the nature of sin. Elimelech takes his family to Moab thinking, we're just going to be there a short time only to find out he will never return. Some of you here today may have an experience in your life in which you said, I'm just going to dabble with this sin just one time, just to see what it's like.

I'm just going to test the waters. I'm just going to stick my toe in the waters and then I'm done with it. And now it's a decade later and you find that you cannot leave it. That's the nature of sin. It always is consuming. It always is overtaking and overwhelming and it will always take you down that path further than you planned to go.

Elimelech never planned to live in Moab. He just planned to go there and ride out the worst part of the storm of the famine. So they went to the country of Moab and they remained there. Also, we see here not just the nature of sin, how sin has drug a limit like in his family into this this context in which they never or he never leaves and his sons never leave.

But also we see something here are the futility of the human solution to the problem. The human solution is, well, let's go over there. There's food in Moab and yes, God has told us to have nothing to do with those people. But you know what there's food there and there's not food here now again We look at this carefully because we weren't there our children weren't crying.

We weren't looking at empty cupboards We weren't looking at dry dusty fields. And so we don't know firsthand what it was like we don't even know what a famine was like and so therefore we're careful in passing judgment as Jesus will say we recognize the log in our own eye before we recognize the speck in a Elimelech's eye, but nonetheless Nonetheless, don't we still see something of the futility of the human solution?

I've got a plan. I've got now we don't know whose plan it was. Maybe it was Naomi's plan. We're never told maybe it was Naomi who nagged Elimelech into going and every night she would say, you know, the baby's a crime I don't have anything to give him Elimelech. I've got nothing to give him. We've got no hope here Let's go there and maybe Elimelech was the one who delayed as long as he could and finally he couldn't delay any longer Or maybe it was a Elimelech as the leader of that patristic family who said this is what we're doing and Naomi had no voice In it.

We don't know But in either case, we see the futility of saying I will take matters into my own hand reminds us of how the whole nation began, didn't it? As Abraham was promised the promised child, and yet the child wasn't coming, wasn't coming, wasn't coming. Let me help God out just a little bit. I've got an idea.

We can do this thing with our servant and we will help God along. You see the futility of the human wisdom there. So he goes there and to Moab and he remains now, now verse three, but Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, die another tragedy. You see how it's, we're just in verse three and how the tragedies are stacking one upon another.

One upon another. We live in a sinful age. Now we're under the judgment of God. In our sinfulness, we have gone to this wicked, idolatrous land, and now the biggest weight of all, the biggest tragedy of all, Naomi finds herself husbandless. Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died and she was left with her two sons.

We were Naomi. We would probably be saying to ourself right about now, it can't get any worse. You think that you might have said that to yourself? It just can't get any worse than this. We have not had food. We have not had fellowship with God. We're out of the land of promise. I haven't seen my family in years.

We live among these Moabite people. And now, my husband's gone. You see, it can always get worse. It can always get worse. And there is no promise There is no promise, whatever situation you face. There's no promise that you've seen the worst of it. There's no promise that God's working in that situation has reached its apex.

And so there's no reason for Naomi to say, we just speculate, but it seems to make sense to me that she would say, what could possibly happen that's worse than this? But maybe she does look at the bright side. Now she's husbandless in the ancient world, which is dramatically, dramatically worse than being husbandless in the modern world.

She finds herself husbandless, but at least she can say, I've got my two sons. I at least have my two sons. And in this day and in this age, that meant that she would be cared for. She had two men who, upon reaching adults, adulthood would care for her. And then there was the hope. Well, there's still be grandchildren.

There's still life. There's still hope. This is an awful, tragic period of my life. I have no idea why God is doing this, but at least things can get better because, you know, there'll be weddings to come. There'll be some grandchildren to come. I have that to look forward to. Verse These took Moabite.

Why? The next tragedy.

These Moabite wives that are worldwide known as the whores of the ancient world, as the sexually deviant of the ancient world, and they take wives from among the Moabites. Not just one, but both of them. So the next tragedy compounds upon her life. And so now she has a life to look forward to, of two daughters in law who come over to her house to sit at her table, to eat under her roof.

Who are of these kinds of people. It's not bad enough that I live among these people. But now they're part of my family. They took Moabite wives. If only your father was here. If only Elimelech was still here. This never would have happened. These took Elimelech wives. The name of the one was Orpah. And the name of the other, Ruth.

Ruth is a derivative of a word that means something like friendship, and so we'll see that play out as we go along. They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Killian died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Now the tragedies are complete. In five verses, we have witnessed a decade of tragedy upon tragedy upon tragedy upon tragedy.

The author narrates it in this staccato like style. Just one right after the other. No explanation, no reason, just boom, boom, boom, boom. Much like Job. You remember the story of Job. How the tragedies of Job are just narrated in such blunt, staccato like style. Quick fashion. There's the losing of the animals, the losing of the crops, the losing of the, of, of his family.

Boom, boom, boom. And then the losing of his health. Much the same thing here. Tragedy. Tragedy, tragedy, tragedy. Finally, the tragedy of all tragedies. The only two that she had left to care for her, to provide for her, now they die so that the woman was left Without her two sons and without her husband. You ever been in that place or maybe you know some people who are in that place who reach a point in life in which they say, this is just not how I thought things would end.

This is just not how I thought my life would turn out. This is just not how I pictured the golden years of my life. This is just not how I pictured retirement. I pictured retirement as reaching that point in which I can stop working and do some things and go play some golf and go drink these little drinks with these little tiny umbrellas while I lay in a hammock and maybe go tour the U.

S. or go tour the world or whatever. I didn't plan on this disease. I didn't plan on this cancer. I didn't plan on this happening to my spouse. This is not the way I thought that my golden years would end. Naomi is in such a position as this, but notice with me that both as both Malon and Killian died So the woman was left without her two sons and her husband I wonder if you can think with me just something about what the neighbors and Moab thought of a Elimelech and his family.

Let's think about this. Think about the testimony to the Moabite people of this one Israelite family living among them. Imagine you're this Moabite people and here's this one family of Israelites. They come and they're living among you and they've got this strange god. Your, your God demands child sacrifices and you have this multitude of gods and all this, this pantheon of, of idols that you worship and everything.

And they, through their, through their false idolatry, they promote sexual, promiscuity and all these kinds of wickedness and everything. But these Israelites, you know that they come from a context in which their God is very different. They, they believe in one God and they believe that that one God is God over everything.

Not just. over this area of life or that area of life or whatever it may be. And they are these people, they call themselves the people of the covenant. And they claim that this God has written down things for them. So I wonder what these kind of people are like. I wonder what their God is like. Let's watch them.

Let's watch how their God treats them. Oh, wait a minute. Why are they even here? They're here from the land that their God supposedly gave to them because their God wasn't feeding them there. And what's more, let's now, wait a minute, the father is dead. What kind of God does that? And now the two sons are dead.

Do you get a flavor of what the Moabite idolatrous people must have thought? Of such a people who claim to know the one true living God, would you not have thought that if God wanted a powerful witness among the Moabites, what would he have done? But heap blessing upon blessing upon the one Israelite family among them, and yet what God does is the very opposite.

You see, this points us to some, something that is a crucial and important and widespread mistake that is made today in Western Christianity, and that is the false belief that God desires to be glorified among non-believers by means of his material blessings to believers. That is a widespread lie that Christians promote that somehow God desires glorification on the part of non-believers because He has blessed His people materially so much.

Nowhere in Scripture is that truth born out nowhere in scripture? Do we see ever God desiring to have nonbelieving people look at just how he heaps material blessings onto his people and then the nonbelievers say, wow, that guy, they really got it going on. Their God is really giving them the stuff that we like.

We ought to think about going over to that God. That's not how the economy of God ever works. Here's how God wants to receive glory from nonbelievers. He wants to receive glory from nonbelievers because his people may sometimes experience material blessings, may sometimes experience famine, but whatever they experience, they still glorify him.

That's how he desires to see glory. He desires to be glorified when his people see him as more precious. Then possessions or lack of possessions. Then money or lack of money. Then health or sickness. Regardless, this is how God desires to be glorified. Philippians 13, 13. I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me or Job 13 in verse 15. Though he slay me, I will hope in him. The same sort of thing is communicated. Psalm 84 verse 10 for a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

So many other places we could see this same principle. Sometimes God will bring material blessings to his people. Sometimes he will withhold them. Sometimes he will take his people into the depths of poverty. Sometimes he will take everything from them. Sometimes he will give them everything. Never is he doing that for the purpose of other people seeing how he treats his people and say, I want some of that.

Instead, what he desires is for the non-believing world to see that and see the hope that lies within them. The precious Hope that lies within them that regardless of how this life treats them And so you see how God is never embarrassed to have his people on display in the middle of Moab and take everything from them.

And everyone around there knows that they call Yahweh Lord and this Yahweh that's supposed to be Lord of all has taken everything that they've got. God's never embarrassed about that. He's never ashamed of how others may look upon his people's poverty, his people's lack, his people's hardships. God's never embarrassed for others to look upon that and say their God has allowed them to go to a dark place Their God has taken them to a place of suffering their God has taken them to a place of loss But regardless they still hope in him You see, that's the more powerful testimony.

And that's the testimony that Elimelech's family are giving to those around them. Now, verse 6, And she arose with her daughters in law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. Take note there of where Naomi hears of God's moving.

It's been more than a decade. And what has God been doing? Has God just been quiet? Has Naomi cried out to God and He's been silent through the first tragedy, the second tragedy, the third tragedy, the fourth tragedy, over and over, all these things keep happening, and she just feels cold and distant, and yet she's in the fields of Moab when she hears.

That God has visited His people. You ever been there? You ever been in the fields of Moab? When tragedy after tragedy has struck your life and you feel like that there's been three tragedies in a row and God has been silent through all of them? It may just be that you are not yet to that tragedy at which He will speak.

At which he will then say, now my child, now you're ready for me to work with. Now you have reached the point that you are ready to receive what I have to teach you. You weren't ready on tragedy number two. You weren't ready on tragedy number three. But now you're ready. So she hears in the fields of Moab.

And what does she hear? That the Lord had visited his people and given them food. That's the first occurrence of the covenant name of Yahweh there, all capitals Lord. So the great I am the I am that I am has visited his people and he has given them food. That is something that is so easy for modern people to overlook that God has come and given his people food.

Because again, the disconnect that exists in the modern world, I think is probably the most lamentable disconnect. that exists in the economy of God's family. There are many things that our modern world brings to us in terms of benefits that we are thankful for. I'm thankful for modern medicine. I'm thankful for, things like air conditioning.

I'm thankful for transportation. I'm thankful for a lot of things in our modern world. But all of those things, every one of them, comes with a cost. And I think that the modern convenience that comes with the highest spiritual cost is the modern convenience You

Because I think that is the strongest disconnect that exists in the mind of the modern-day Christian that every bit of that food in the supermarket came directly from God. Because we walk in the supermarket, and it's hard, isn't it? To walk and you see the boxes of Cheerios, and you see the boxes of, of a pancake mix that I had to run out and get this morning because I ran out.

A pancake mix here, but I went to the food line and guess what? There was a whole shelf of pancake mix. Shelves of pickles, peanut butters, jellies, bread, meats, all of it. And that's so easy to walk in there and just think, this stuff is just here. It's here because the supermarket's selling it. Now, we don't go so far as some of those young people that we see today.

You see the crazy videos where young people think that the supermarkets make the food and there's this disconnect between the farmer and the supermarket? We, we, we know that that's not true. But isn't there still that disconnect between the supermarket and God? Isn't there still that disconnect where it's so easy to just think that you have food because you remembered to go grocery shopping?

Because you got your paycheck this week and you went to Food Lion and you stocked up on what your family will need this week and that's why you have food? It's an easy thing to lose sight of.

This is one of the reasons that we prioritize fellowship meals. This is one reason why the fellowship meal that we have before every service is not something that we treat as optional.

It's not something we don't want you as part of the covenant family of God to think that that's something that you come to when you're hungry. We want you to think of that as a non-optional part of the family of God because it does a number of things. Number one, it emphasizes table fellowship. It emphasizes genuine, genuineness of fellowship.

And number two, it reminds us twice a week that God abundantly blesses us and we can see it right here. We can smell it right here. We can taste it right here. Because God provides this for us each and every time. That's a disconnect that the Christian must work hard today to reestablish. When you walk in the grocery store, you should proactively think to yourself, God, thank you for these Cheerios.

Because you brought them to me. Thank you for these eggs. Because you created the chickens that laid these eggs. People may have harvested them and put them in the little containers and trucks may have brought them to the grocery store and Cashiers check them out for you, but God brought you those eggs.

That's a, that's a connection that's important for us to protect. So the Lord had visited his people and given them food, verse seven. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters in law 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.

That's a phrase you don't see every day in the Bible, your mother's house. In fact, I don't think it shows up anywhere else in the Bible. What does that mean? Go to your mother's? It's always your father's house. Well, the research that I did tells me that that probably has something to do, a connotation with an arranged marriage.

And in the sense that the consummation of an arranged marriage in the vernacular of the day was closely connected to mother's house. So essentially what she's saying is, go back and find a husband. It's not too late. You can still find a husband. She says in verse 15, it's too old for me, but not for you.

Go back now and you can find another husband. In fact, she explicitly says it a little bit later. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. In other words, you were good wives. You weren't those Moabite scoundrels that I expected you to be. You were good wives, you treated my sons well, you treated my husband well, you dealt well with the dead, and you have been good daughters to me.

The Lord grant you that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. That is probably the most foolish thing that Naomi says in the entire story. Notice the foolishness of her blessing. May Yahweh bless you as you return to your gods. What an idiotic thing to say. May the Lord grant you rest as you return to the idols of the land who demand child sacrifices from your people.

But may you find rest there. May you find peace. And most of all, may you find a husband. Because that's what's going to make you happy. You see the foolishness of her blessing? We do the same

thing. We do the same thing. You ever hear those words, maybe a mother says of a wayward son, or some godly grandparents might say of a wayward grandchild, I just want them to be happy.

That's the important thing, isn't it? That's the all-important idol. Happiness. I just want them to be happy in the pursuit of their sin. Isn't that the same blessing that Naomi gives her? I just want you to be happy. Find a husband and be happy with your false gods.

It's closely akin to this ridiculous controversy that we are experiencing today. You, I'm sure you've heard of this ridiculous controversy of whether a Christian should go and attend the gay wedding of a friend or family member, to which I want to say, why are we even talking about? Of course you should not.

Of course you should not. Why? Because that's what a wedding ceremony is. It's an affirmation and a celebration of the supposed union that's taking place. Is that not the same thing? May the Lord bless you in your sin. May the Lord just make you happy as you go back to your false gods. You see, may the Lord grant you that you find rest to which we would say there is no rest for the wicked.

There is no peace for the wicked. Each of you in the house of her husband, then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept. The pathos of the story, the emotion of the story is so prominent, especially here in chapter one, the weeping, these three women, they genuinely love one another. They have been through difficulties together.

Each one of them has lost their husband and all they have is The Moabite women have also left their Moabite families to be united together with this Israelite family. So they've all left their families in a sense. And this is all they have is just one another. And the connection, the bond, the love for one another.

They kissed and raised up their voices and they 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 I may become, that they may become your husbands? 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. So we'll save that last phrase for next time, because it We'll pair up nicely with what's being said in chapter two.

But do you see what she's saying? She's reasoning with them. She's using logic. In fact, she's using very sound and reasonable logic. Her logic is this. I don't have a husband even if I did, even if I had a husband and I were pregnant now. Would you wait nine months and then another 18 years? Which, by the way, my husband's dead.

I have no baby in my womb, which means that even if she were to become pregnant from a new husband, the baby would not be the brother of Malion and Chilion, therefore, leveret marriage doesn't apply. Therefore, there is no hope. Her case is rock solid, logically consistent, and sound. But isn't it often that the arguments against the narrow path Are very logical.

Isn't that the way that things tend to work out that the arguments that are law that are raised against the narrow path often tend to be very logically sound arguments. But you see what Naomi's doing here as she's laying out this case. Here's what she's saying. Listen, I have nothing to give you. I have no husband.

I have no more Children. I have no prospects. I am too old to marry. I am an old widow. I have nothing to give you. In other words, I Naomi looks to herself and sees no resources and says to them, since I have no resources, I can't help you.

When what Naomi really has is God and God is who Ruth and Orpah really need. You see, Naomi sees her lack of resource and says, there's nothing I can do. Instead of saying, there's nothing I can do, but there's a God in heaven. Like the words of Daniel, remember Daniel, when they come to him and say, tell us the dream and its interpretation.

Daniel says, there's nothing I can do, but there is a God in heaven. Naomi could say, and should say, there's nothing I can do for you, Orpah and Ruth. But come to me to the land of Yahweh, because what you really need is what He has. What you really need is Him. What you really need is His people. What you really need is to find your home among the covenant people of God.

That's what you really need, Orpah and Ruth. Even if I had a son to give you, that's not the solution. The solution is Yahweh. And yet Naomi does so often like what, what we do, we look to ourself and we see no resource. We say, send them somewhere else. There's nothing I can do when what all of us need is God and the covenant community of God's people.

It is within the covenant community of God's people that Ruth We'll experience redemption now. Verse 14. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again right here I could queue up the standard joke about women crying too easy fruits hanging too low We'll skip over that and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law But Ruth clung to her, that's the same word used in Genesis chapter 2 verse 25 and a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife.

Same word. Hold fast, Ruth held fast, clung to her and she said, see, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. So Orpah has turned around and she has left to go back into Moab. And Naomi says, see, Orpah has gone back to her gods. Now, most of us know the story. It's best if you kind of pretend like you don't know the story and you're hearing it for the first time, but that's hard to do.

We really do know the story, right? And one element of the story is this. How many kinsmen redeemers are there? There's two. Remember that whole discussion about which one is going to be the Kinsman Redeemer? Turns out there were two qualified Kinsman Redeemers all along.

The point there is that all who come will be redeemed. All who come will be received. Had Orpah continued with Naomi? There would have been two kinsmen redeemers, but she didn't come. Instead, she returned to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law, Naomi. What are you saying? We should scream at this point.

Naomi, shut up. Take them to the land of God's people. Take them to the land of God's distinct presence. That's what they need. Verse 16, but Ruth said, do not urge me. Now, now let me pause right here. I want to read this. This is in your notes. You Let's read this in the King James, because I

think that this is probably the most beautifully put speech in the scriptures, and nothing compares to how the King James puts this.

All right, so in your notes here, here we go from verse 16, And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God: ¹⁷ 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.

Isn't that beautiful? You've often heard that at weddings, right? Has nothing to do with a wedding. I mean, it's not wrong that it's read at weddings, has nothing to do with the wedding. Even the context tells us this is a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

It would be more appropriate if wedding ceremonies included this passage in which the, the, bride turned to the future Mother-in-law and said this to the future Mother-in-Law. And the groom turned to the future Mother-in-law and said this to the future, mother-in-law. There that'd be more appropriate.

But you hear the, just the, the depth of the bond here. You hear the beauty as, as Ruth says. Where you die, I will die. The rest of my life is committed to you. My, the rest of my existence is committed to you. Not only when you die, but I remain committed to you, for I'll be buried with you. I want to lie and sleep with you.

In the ancient world, it was very important where one was buried. The gods of the ancient world were seen to be very geographical. And so if one was buried outside the land of their gods, that was seen as not something that was appropriate. So to be buried with Ruth, or to be buried with Naomi, Ruth is saying, I am with you not only this life, but for eternity, this life and the next one.

And then she takes this vow. May God do so to me. And worse, if I forsake you, if I forsake you, may Yahweh forsake me. If I abandon you, may Yahweh abandon me. We should hear in these words here. These are words that we should not limit to the story of a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. What Ruth is really saying to Naomi are the words of the covenant people of God.

This is the sentiment. That the covenant people of God expressed to one another. This is the type of commitment and the type of bond that the community of God's people should experience and should feel towards one another. The level of commitment. Now, I don't mean that we say to each other, you know, I'm gonna follow you home.

And, you know, when you get home, I'll be right there behind you and I'll be watching you cooking your lunch and that sort of thing. But what it does mean is that's the type of love and connection and commitment that is standard, normal for the body of Christ. This is a description, not a description. Of some ancient vow that was made between two women.

This is a description of the body of Christ. As Ruth here, on the road to Bethlehem, experiences true and genuine conversion to Naomi's God. To God, the God known as Yahweh. As she experiences that true and genuine conversion. These are the words out of my, of her mouth. The commitment that I have to you is to this level, to this degree.

This is something that I, I hope we all find so helpful because this is describing a commitment among the body of Christ. That's not, Oh, well, if I'm not there today, they won't miss me. I was there last week. I can, I can be gone one week. This is okay. Well, okay. I was, I was gone week four. Okay. I'll see him next week.

It'd be all right. I got kind of something else I'm doing today. Do you see how that's like oil and water to what Ruth declares to Naomi? This is the bond of God's people. Let me just read to us just a few sentences from our member. Covenant. We will walk together in brotherly love as becomes the members of a Christian church exercise an affectionate care, not just a care, an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others. We will endeavor to bring up such as it may at any time be under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows. Does that sound something to you? Like a plural modern version of what Ruth says to Naomi. Does that sound to you something like the commitment that Ruth vocalizes to Naomi? So we should see these as the words of God's people devoting themselves to one another.

But there's another way that these words come to us. Because these words also mean to us that these are the words of our Savior to us. Naomi on the road to Bethlehem is somewhat of a picture, a representation of Christ. Who would say if you want to come with me, you better make sure that you don't want to go back to your gods But if you do want to come with me, then these words ring true where you go I will go where you die when you're there together when you lie in the grave We are there together for I will never leave you and I will never forsake you So we see something of a picture of Christ Don't we in Ruth who declares to this mother-in-law?

There's nothing that will separate us Not, not even death, not even eternity will separate us. That speaks something to us of the Savior, who likewise says to us, there is nothing that will separate us.