

Ruth #2**November 19, 2023****Series Title: Ruth: Painful Providence and Sovereign Grace****Today's Message: Naomi's Bitter But Prevailing Faith; Ruth 1:6-22**

Naomi's bitter but hopeful faith. Is that even possible? Can you have a bitter but hopeful faith?

How about when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and a strong storm arose? We are told,

"A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?'

"Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." (Mark 4:37-39)

Or when at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee it came to Mary, Jesus' mother, that the wine was gone? Oh, what an embarrassing situation. You can sense Mary's great distress when she turns to Jesus and says, "They have no more wine." (John 2:3)

The Gospels are full of accounts of people who were in terrible, painful, hopeless circumstances. In those circumstances they had several options available to them: 1) they could curse God; 2) they could scramble for solutions of their own design, ignoring God altogether; or 3) they could, in their hearts, turn to God believing that God was in it with them, even in the pain.

Remember Romans 15:4, which says, "For everything written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scripture we might have hope." Certainly as we study the book of Ruth we will develop a more sure, enduring faith; a faith that proves the faithfulness of God even when it seems like our boat is about to sink, or our hearts are empty and the joy of living runs low.

I hope that the approach I take in wrestling with Ruth chapter 1 is helpful. My hope is that while we spend the majority of our time learning lessons from Naomi's faith, we will see the invisible presence of God behind the scenes abiding with Naomi, animating Naomi, and leading Naomi.

But first let me define what *faith* we are talking about. We are presupposing a faith that is anchored on the knowledge of the God of the Bible. So, it is necessary to believe that God exists and is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him. For Hebrews 11:6 teaches,

"For without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him (acknowledges or calls upon Him) must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

So, today as you are watching Naomi and learning about her faith, and as you compare your faith to hers, as no doubt you will, please, please keep on the lookout for the invisible presence of God, remembering that He is at work through the invisible operation of His *Painful Providence and Sovereign Grace*. If you will remember this on the dark days of your life you will be greatly comforted; you will have hope that will

carry you through impossible situations. You will see the Light of Life and eventually praise His holy Name! By the end of the book both Naomi and Ruth certainly will!

I. (1:6-7) A Responsive Faith

A. Naomi “heard” what God was doing in Israel

1. News had reached Moab. No doubt the market place was buzzing with the news
 - a) Relief had come from the Lord to the people of Israel.
 - b) The Lord was providing food in Israel! Better a morsel in Israel than a feast in Moab! Better a morsel at the Lord’s table than feasting elsewhere.

(1) Psalm 94:14 assures us that “the Lord will not forsake His people and will not abandon His inheritance.”

(a) Repentance had come to the people. In the book of Judges, if you remember, there was the repeated cycle:

- (i) prosperity and God’s favor,
- (ii) Sin. The people would turn from God
- (iii) Repentance. The People would turn back to God

(a) Repentance is a gift from God (2 Ti.2:25)

(iv) Restoration, prosperity and favor

2. We cannot forget how important “hearing” is to faith!

a) Romans 10:17: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

(1) Your ears hear the voice, or report, of man, but your heart hears the voice of Christ through faith!

(a) Naomi heard the reports in the marketplace with her ears, and her heart heard the voice of God saying, “The Lord has done this marvelous thing!”

B. Naomi responded in faith

1. (1:6) Naomi **prepared** to leave Moab

a) She packed up and prepared for the long, difficult journey up to Israel.

(1) It was uphill all the way.

(2) Better a difficult road in repentance back to Israel than to remain at ease in Moab!

(a) Preparation requires a counting of the cost.

(i) With her husband and sons dead, Naomi would have a hard life in Israel.

(a) A hard life in Israel is better than the ease and comfort in Moab.

2. (1:7) Naomi **departed** Moab

a) Severing ties with the world in repentance **will be hard** at first but the way becomes easier the closer you get to God.

b) Naomi was a “radiant” presence in Moab, as her name indicates.

(1) As one commentator wrote, “Naomi was a radiant presence in Moab. When she departed, so did her radiance depart, too. When she left Moab, no doubt a sense of righteousness and spiritual splendor departed from her village.

(a) Her departure left a hole in Moab.

- c) Her response was evidence of a prevailing faith that was of greater worth than the “gold” of Moab.

- (1) Her faith was displayed in her departure from Moab.

II. (1:8-12; 14-18) A Prevailing Faith

A. A Hopeful Faith

- 1. Faith, according to Hebrews 11:1 is “...being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

- a) Naomi was facing uncertainty and unknown prospects in her return to Israel and Bethlehem in particular.

- (1) But, regardless, she was sure of what she hoped for! She saw through the eyes faith what her physical eyes could not see.

- b) Remember, this story is written for our encouragement, endurance and for our hope!

- (1) We must believe that trusting God and obeying His word, even when we cannot comprehend the outcome is better than even one minute of comfort in the world.

B. (1:8-9) A Praying faith

- 1. Naomi prayed for her daughters-in-law.

- a) “May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to your dead, and to me.”

- (1) Hebrews 6:10: “The Lord is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”

- b) “May the Lord grant you rest in the home of another husband.”

- c) Naomi was praying for God’s grace to be manifest in their lives even as they would remain in Moab, even among the wicked.

C. (1:14-18) A radiant and attractive faith

- 1. Her faith and the expression of it over the years in Moab was so attractive that even in the current season of bitterness, Ruth could not be persuaded to leave her.

- a) Naomi had built a godly life that was attractive and irresistible to Ruth!

- (1) In an even greater way, the gospel is irresistible to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

- (a) Oftentimes, the beauty of the grace of God is first observed in the lives of faithful men and women who find God’s grace irresistible!

- 2. Ruth could go nowhere else, or be with anyone else except Naomi and her God!

- a) Read Ruth 1:16-17

- (1) Ruth could not be discouraged from following Naomi and yoking herself to God and His people!

- (a) Repentance!

- 3. (1:18) No amount of present bitterness in Naomi could erase the beauty of God’s grace in the eyes of Ruth.

- a) God is so very generous. He blesses our weak faith. When we are bitter and broken, God’s does not leave Himself without a testimony.

- b) I think there is a sense in which your faith and godliness accrues interest over the years. When you feel empty, and your faith is weak, there is a treasury to draw from. Having a life of proven faithfulness buys a lot of

mercy from the people who know you! Because of that, God is pleased to continue to work graciously through you in the dark times, even making your pain and distress shout loudly, "God is faithful!"

- c) Naomi did have to stop actively discouraging Ruth!
 - (1) At some point in your suffering, you have to stop discouraging others and make a commitment to encourage those who are attending to you.
 - (a) Adopt Paul's mindset, "Our hearts ache and are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything!"
 - (i) LET YOUR FAITH IN GOD PREVAIL!

III. (1:13; 19-21) A Bitter Faith

- A. Naomi's prevailing faith supported her in her season of bitterness
- B. (1:19) Apparently the women in Bethlehem noticed a difference. They could see in her countenance.
- C. So, how can we say that she had faith when she was so bitter?
 - 1. She acknowledges two things: Bitterness and God's hand in it.
 - a) (1:13): "It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me."
 - b) (1:20): "'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.'"
 - c) (1:21a): "I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty."
 - d) (1:21b,c): "The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought me misfortune."
 - (1) The world cannot contribute one ounce of comfort that can match the knowledge of a faithful believer that the invisible hand of God is at work.
 - (a) IF GOD KNOWS HOW TO TAKE AWAY, HE KNOWS HOW TO ADD.
 - (b) IF HE EMPTIES YOU OF YOUR SELF-RELIANCE, HE KNOWS HOW TO FILL YOU UP WITH GREATER FAITH IN HIM!

IV. (1:22) A Rewarded Faith

- A. Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. (Rom. 5:3-4)
 - 1. She arrived in Bethlehem at just the right time.
- B. God's timing is always right.
 - 1. All the good that God has in mind starts here for Naomi, Ruth, Israel and us!
- C. APPLICATION::
 - 1. The answer to your problems is NOT to go further away from Him, but nearer!
 - a) James 4:8a: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you!"
 - 2. What problems are you facing that has made your heart bitter?
 - a) What can you learn from Naomi about how to process your trouble and the bitterness you feel?
 - (1) That is not something anyone can tell you what to do. You need to go to the Bible and to prayer, and then act in faith!

3. The Story in Ruth begins with such sorrow because we can clearly feel the frowning providence of God. But wait, God's sovereign grace is beginning to bud!
 - a) That is what we learn from Ruth 1:22