

Running From Your Problems

Ruth 1

Pastor John Miller

How many of you have never studied the Book of Ruth? Raise your hand. I'm always interested in some people that maybe, is there anybody here that has never read the Book of Ruth? Raise your hand. You're in for a real, real, marvelous treat and if you've studied the Book of Ruth for many times, you're still in for a real treat. Even if we just read the story, it is a marvelous story.

It's one of the two books of the Bible that is named after a woman. You ladies should be encouraged by that. There's the Book of Ruth and then there's the Book of Esther, but an interesting contrast is that Ruth was a Moabitess, she was a Gentile and Esther was a Jewess, one a Gentile and the other a Jew. In the Book of Ruth, it's interesting, it opens with a famine. In the Book of Esther, it opens with a feast. In the Book of Ruth, it ends with the birth of a baby. In the Book of Esther, it ends with the death of an enemy.

There's a lot of interesting contrast between these two books, but not belaboring the introduction, I would just say that the book of Ruth has many themes and lessons and truths that run through a marvelous love story. It is the love story and the primary teaching through the Book of Ruth is the story of redemption and not just any kind of redemption, what is known as the kinsman redeemer.

As we go through the story of Ruth, we're going to see that Boaz, who redeems the land and takes the bride, Ruth, is a picture of Jesus Christ. We're going to see Jesus Christ all the way through this marvelous Book of Ruth and that he is the Goel, the kinsman redeemer, and that he was near of like Jesus became man and that he had the price as Jesus gave his life, and that he was willing to take the bride as Boaz took Ruth and Jesus takes the church. There are many marvelous parallels in the picture of redemption, and it's even fitting that we study this up to Christmas because Christmas is the coming of the redeemer. Amen.

Jesus Christ, the redeemer, and He came to redeem us and He is the heavenly bridegroom and we, the church, are the bride, as Ruth and Boaz are picture of Christ and the church. One of my favorite themes that runs through the Book of Ruth, and we'll develop it again as we go through, is the theme of the providential hand of God. If you just read the Book of Ruth and you just realized how God wove together providentially the purpose and the plan in the lives of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz, that through that line, would come Jesus Christ, the redeemer, it's a mind-blowing story.

This girl, Ruth, the Moabitess, they despised people in a foreign land. In her wildest dreams, in her wildest imagination, would've never imagined that one day, she would be in the ancestry of the Savior of the world. When you look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 1, you find her name mentioned there of this little group of four women.

By the way, three of the four women mentioned in the genealogies of Jesus Christ were

Gentiles. They weren't Jewish. One of them was a prostitute and one of them here is a Moabite, the woman Ruth. She would've never been able to imagine that through her tragedy and through her heartache and all that happened to her that God was weaving providentially a beautiful tapestry. I do believe, grab a hold of this, that we see so shortsightedly, that we look around and all we see is our problems and our sorrows and our heartaches and our miseries.

We don't realize that God is weaving a tapestry. We just see the backside of it and doesn't have any kind of purpose or rhyme or reason to it, but God sees the other side and He's weaving together even the dark threads of our life to make a beautiful tapestry. Someday, if not this side of heaven, at least the other side of heaven, we're going to go, "Wow, isn't God amazing?" Don't get too discouraged tonight. If you're facing problems and difficulties, God knows what He is doing.

Now, I'm titled chapter one and we're going to take it one chapter a week, one, two, three and four. We'll finish up after Christmas. The title I've given to it tonight is Sorrow and Weeping, chapter one. The title of my message tonight is Running From Your Problems. We're going to learn that it's not a good idea to try to run away from your problems. In chapter one, we see three mistakes that people make in dealing with the problems of life. If you're taking notes, you can write them down.

Number one, they try to run from their problems. We see in verses one to five, the bad decision that these individuals made, begin in verse one of chapter one, "Now, it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land and a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons, and the name of the man was Elimelech, which means by the way, my God is king, and the name of his wife was Naomi, which means pleasant," or pleasantness or some have sweetness or my sweetness. Great name for a wife, Naomi, my sweetness.

"The name of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, of Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah and they came into the country of Moab and they continued there and Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left and her two sons and they took them wives of the women of Moab, the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other was Ruth and so they dwelt there for about 10 years. Mahlon and Chilion died, both of them and the woman was left of her two sons and of her husband."

What you see in this first five verses, it's first of all, the time setting of the Book of Ruth. Notice it in verse one, "It came to pass in the days when the judges ruled." It came to pass in the time when the judges ruled. The Book of Ruth took place, historically, during the time of the judges. Now, you know, as well as I do, if you've read the Book of Judges or study the Book of Judges, that the theme of the Book of judges is basically every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Someone has said the Judges is the time when there was no king in Israel. It was a time of apostasy. It was a time of war. It was a time of sin. It was a time of rebellion. It was a time of

darkness. They had turned away from God and they would be judged by God. They'd be attacked by their enemies. They'd turned back to God. God would bless them. Then, they'd turn away from God and then they'd go into captivity. They'd be attacked by their enemies. It's kind of war, peace, war, peace.

It was a very difficult time for the nation of Israel. I do believe that it parallels the day and the age in which we live in right now. There is no king that is the Lord Jesus Christ in America today. We have all the strife. We have all the backlash of our rebellion against God and all the problems that we're reaping right now. Problems in America are spiritual. It's a spiritual void. We forsaken God. We've thrown his law behind our back and we're reaping what we've sown.

The setting in the context and in light of that, I find it interesting. In the worst of times, there are still good Godly people. Amen. No matter how bad people are around you, no matter how dark the culture gets, God still has His people, but the key is that we need to shine in the darkness. We need to be uncompromising in the darkness. The darker the world gets, the brighter we need to shine. The more the world rebels against God, the more we have to speak up in favor of the word of God and the things of God. Amen.

Even though they were during the time of the Judges, but the time of the writing of the book was believed to be, and we cannot be sure or dogmatic during the time of King David's reign because David is mentioned in the end of the book, the last verse, we see that this is the lineage of King David through whom the Messiah would come. It's believed that it's written actually during the time of King David and we don't know the human author.

We do know the divine author was the Holy Spirit. Most commonly, it's believed that Samuel, the prophet, wrote the Book of Ruth, but again, he's not named or mentioned in the book, so we don't really know who it is that the penman was the Holy Spirit used, but there's no king during the time of the Judges. Then, 1 Samuel, which comes after that, would be a time of man's king, King Saul, when he was sitting on the throne and they had a king that wasn't according to God's plan.

Then, 2 Samuel would be God's king, King David. Many see in this picture of that we live during the time of the Judges and that soon there will be man's king, the darkness that comes known as the tribulation, when the anti-Christ will sit on the throne of the world and he will rule the world being Satan's man of the hour until God's king, the greater son of David, comes in power and glory and establishes his kingdom on the Earth forever and ever and ever.

Now, I want you to notice the place where this took place. It took place in Bethlehem, Judah. The word Bethlehem, Beth means house and Lehem is bread. It's Bethlehem, house of bread. Bethany is house of ripe figs. It took place in Bethlehem. Does that have a familiar ring to you? Oh, little town of Bethlehem, right? Jesus was born in Bethlehem. This Book of Ruth ties right in with the future hope of the coming again of the Messiah, the savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Now, notice that there was a famine in the land. It doesn't tell us why there was a famine, but we

can guess why there was a famine because the people of God had turned away from God and as a result, there was a famine in their land. God had actually said that if you turn away from me, that the heavens will keep from raining. Now, I don't have any idea that this is why we have a drought in California right now, but it certainly wouldn't hurt for us to turn back to the Lord. Amen.

I mean as you look around, see everything dying, you're thinking not only do we need rain, we need Jesus. Because they turned away from God, God stayed the heavens from giving their rain as kind of a chastising of them to bring them back to God. Then, they made a really foolish decision during this difficult time, he was in the country, he decided to go, at the end of verse one, to the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

Now, it's generally believed by Bible scholars and I concur that again, this was a lack of faith on Elimelech's part. I believe that had he stayed in Israel, had he trusted the Lord as he looked to God, as he depended upon God, as he waited on God, God would take care of him.

The Bible says, "I've been young and now I'm old." It was the time I was young and now I'm old. I can quote that verse really good now. When I was young and I was a young preacher, I used to say, "Once I was young and now I'm old." I'm like, "Once I'm young and I'm still young, but someday, I'll be old." I started preaching in my early 20s. I won't tell you how old I'm now, but probably most of you can figure it out.

David said, "Look, I've been young and now I'm old and I've never once seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread." Isn't that awesome? God will take care of you. I believe that Elimelech should have stayed in the land of promise and trusted God and God would've taken care of him.

I believe the decision he made, says verse two, that the name, his name was Elimelech, the name of his wife, Naomi, and the name of his sons, Mahlon and Chilion, the word Mahlon means weak, and the word Chilion means pining. These guys were probably born very weak and frail, not a very great name for these two, and is evident because they do end up dying in the land.

We see in this first chapter a lot of funerals. Elimelech dies. Mahlon, Chilion die. Naomi had lost her husband and her two sons. Orpah and Ruth lost their husbands. It's a chapter of sorrow. It's a chapter of weeping. Unbelief and fear gave them this bad idea that we need to take things into our own hands. The problem was they're walking by sight and not by faith.

I'll bet you there's someone here tonight that's facing a difficulty and you're thinking about running from your problem. I'm going to go here. I'm going to go there. I'm not going to go to church anymore. I won't read my Bible. I'm not going to trust God. Maybe I'll lie a little bit. I'll steal a little bit. Maybe I'll do this. I'll take things into my own hands. I'll work the problem out or I'm going to run here. Run there. You cannot run from your problems. Anybody want to say amen to that?

You want to know the reason why you can't run from your problems? Because you're your biggest problem. Do you ever notice you take yourself with you everywhere you go? I try to get away from me, but everywhere I go, I take me with me. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. I'm going to move to Hawaii. That's where everybody's happy, the happy place.

I'll just go to Disneyland every day. I'll be happy until you see how much it costs to get in when you go into a depression. How could they call it a happy place when it costs you, you have to mortgage your house to get into the place? I don't get that. It'd be a happy place if it was free, I could dig that. Call it free land instead of Disneyland. You cannot run away from your problems.

When I was young and all my friends were moving to Hawaii and that was the idea, we're going to surf, we're going to hang out, we'll live on the beach, we'll eat coconuts and mangoes and bananas and surf every day. I did that for a couple months. We all realized you can't run away from your problems. You just take your sinful self with you. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. If you're here tonight, maybe you're trying to run away from a marriage, maybe from a relationship, maybe from a bad situation, you can't run away from your problems.

I want you to notice the consequences of trying to run away from your problems. In verse three, it says, "Elimelech, Naomi husband died and she was left and her two sons." We have the first death in chapter one of Elimelech, Naomi's husband. Now, her sons took wives of Moab. Now, the Bible actually said that they were not to intermarry with the Moabites.

By the way, Moab, the people of Moab, which is down on the east side of the Dead Sea, northeast corner side of the Jordan River, of the Dead Sea, which is kind of Jordan today, Moab were the descendants of Lot through an incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter and they became the enemies of Israel. They attacked Israel quite often.

God says, "You're not to intermarry with the Moabite people. You're to stay away from." They worship false gods and pagan idols and they would influence Israel to turn away from God. This is not a real good thing. I think Elimelech made a big mistake in running with his family down to Moab and subjecting them to the influences of Moab, very, very, very dangerous thing, but God can redeem even our failings. God can give us beauty for our ashes. They took wives. There was Orpah and there was Ruth, and they dwelt there for about 10 years.

Now, they went there just to sojourn for a short time and they ended up spending 10 years and perhaps several months there. Then, the two sons died, Mahlon and Chilion, sick and pining, they died, both of them, and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. Now, what we have is three widows.

Now, if you are a child of God, if you are a child of God, you may not understand this, but if you walk away from God, if you turn your back from God, you get in the flesh and you walk away from God, I can tell you what is going to happen, God is going to give you a spanking. That's a common word we use toward the Bible calls it chastening, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.

God will spank you. You go, "That's not very nice." Yes it is. You ever met some little kids that have never been spanked? Please spank that child. I will spank that child for you. I'll probably go to prison, but I'll do it anyway. Ever seen kids throwing the temper tantrum at the store? Would you like me to take care of your kid? Pastor Miller gets arrested beating a child.

The Bible says, when you're spanking them, don't let your soul spare for their crying. Just let them scream. They're not going to die. I'm not talking about doing it in anger. I'm not talking about beating a child. I'm not talking about hurting a child. I'm talking about correcting a child because God loves you.

The Bible says it like this, it says, "Whom the Lord loves, whom the Lord loves," someone called that, what strange love, "Whom the Lord loves, he chasten." He loves you so much. He loves you so much. He's not going to let you get away with mischievous things.

One of the marks that you are a child of God is you can't get away with sin. God chastens you and he spansks you and he corrects you and he brings you back onto the path of the straight and narrow. For that, you could be thankful, amen, that God cares enough about you to allow things to come into your, her husband dies, her son dies, her sons die, and I believe that God was going to use this, not only in Naomi's life, but certainly in Ruth, who is the heroine of our story, this beautiful Moabitess girl by the name of Ruth.

The point at this spot in the text that I'd like to make is that you cannot run from your problems because God will chasten you. I love what Oswald Chamber says. He says, "A man has to learn that the plague of his own, has to learn the plague of his own heart before his own problems can be solved. You have to learn the plague of your own heart before your problems can be solved."

Many years ago when I was in a little kind of ministerial training school with pastor Chuck Smith back in the early '70s, I'll never forget in a little Q&A time, there was just about 20 of us in the room, one of the guys said, "Pastor Chuck, what's the most difficult, hardest thing that you have to deal with?" I'll never forget his answer. He said, "Myself. My flesh. My sinful heart."

How true that is, my biggest battles are myself. If I think I can just run over here and be free of problem and run over here and I'm going to free of problem and I don't realize that I have to run to God and let God deal with my pain, let God deal with my problems, let God deal with my hurt, and that my biggest problem is me, I'll never get anywhere in the Christian life. I think it's important that we admit today that we are the problem.

The second thing that many people do wrong when they face problems is they try to hide or cover their sin and they give bad advice or they go a wrong direction. This is from six verse six, follow me down to verse 18. It says, "That then she arose with her daughters-in-law."

Now, Naomi's been there for 10 years. She's got two daughter-in-laws. Her sons are dead and buried. They probably went and wept again at the grave. Her husband's dead and buried. It's just the three widows. "She arose," verse six, "with her daughters-in-law that she might return

from the country of Moab, for she had heard," notice this verse six, "in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread."

Interesting, that she only heard there was bread in Bethlehem. She hadn't yet been able to experience or enjoy the bread of Bethlehem. She wanted to return to the place of blessing. The idea is that sometimes when we are drifting away from God, we find out that we are not in the place where God can bless us. When you pray, say, God bless me, God bless me, God bless me, God bless me, let me recommend another little prayer that you can tag onto that, God make me blessable. Ever thought about that?

Make me blessable. Help me to live in the place where I can be blessed by you, because God isn't going to bless you when you're living in rebellion. You're going to reap what you sown. She only heard about the grain and the bread and the fruit in Bethlehem, which is interesting that back in verse one, we saw there was a famine in the land of what? Bethlehem, the house of bread. Interesting, Bethlehem means house of bread and there was a famine in the house of bread.

After hearing about bread in Bethlehem, she says, "Wherefore," she went verse seven, "out of the place where she was and her two daughters-in-law with her and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah." Now, it could be again, that Naomi's motive is just we need to eat, so we're going to go back. We need to eat. We left and now we need to eat, so we go back. Instead of really walking by faith and trusting in the Lord, they're just living for the physical.

Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, "Go and return each of you to your mother's house and the Lord, Jehovah," all capitals, L-O-R-D, "deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that you may find rest each of you in your house of her husband." Then, she kissed them and they lifted up their voice and here it is, they wept and they said unto her, "Surely, we will return with thee unto thy people."

Naomi said, "Turn again my daughters. Why will you go with me? Are there not any more sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters. Go your way for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say that I have hope, if I should have a husband, also this night, should he also bear? Should I also bear sons? Would you carry for them until they were grown? Would you stay for them from having a husband? No, my daughters, for grieve with me much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone against me."

She's kind of recognizing that I'm the one that is partly to blame and responsible for this chastening hand of God. You are kind of part of the problems because God's chastening me, it's affecting you. If we rebel against God and we get in the flesh and we turn away from God and God chastens us, it can affect the people around us. How many times in the marriages have I seen a husband or a wife rebel against God? It affects their spouse and their children and their church and other people. It's going to affect others around you. We don't sin only unto ourselves.

It says that they lifted up their voice, verse 14 and wept again and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth cleaved unto her and she said, "Behold, my sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods." Notice that back to the pagan gods of Moab, "Return thou after thy sister-in-law."

Now, this kind of, and forgive me for getting down on Naomi here, but it's like Naomi, Naomi, Naomi, why would you send these girls back to a land of pagan gods? Why wouldn't you say, "Come with me, my daughters to the land of Israel and learn about the God of Israel, the God of everything, the true and living God. Why would you say go back to your gods?" Shame on Naomi for not wanting the girls to go with them back to the land of God's people.

Ruth speaks these beautiful words, verse 16, one of the greatest utterances of faith and conviction in the whole Bible. They're read so often in wedding ceremonies, "Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you nor to return from following after you, for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God, and where thou diest, I will die and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also if aught, but death part thee and me.' When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her."

Now, the first thing you see is Naomi trying to cover up. Now, this is a theory, and I make that clear, this is a theory, we can't be dogmatic about this, but the theory is that Naomi didn't want to take the girls back to the land of Bethlehem because she was ashamed that her sons had married two women from Moab. Again, I don't know. We'll have to ask Naomi when we get to heaven, it's just a theory, but I do know that are a lot of times that people try to cover up their sin.

You know what the Bible says? It says, "If you try to cover your sin, you're not going to prosper, but if you confess your sin and you forsake your sin, the Lord will show you mercy." If you're here tonight, come clean. You don't have to confess your sins to me, but you should confess your sins to God and if you're honest before God and confess your sins, the Bible says God is faithful and just to do what? Forgive us of our sins and He cleanses from all unrighteousness. Amen.

First thing you do is you don't try to run from your problems. Second, you don't try to hide your problems or try to cover your sin. You confess your sins to God. Then, Orpah, she gave up. In verse 14, she returns to the land of Moab and we never hear about her again. She drops off the pages of scripture, but Ruth, she stands up. Naomi tries to cover up. Orpah tries to give up and Ruth stands up. We see her great and marvelous and wonderful faith.

Ruth says to her mother-in-law, "Don't ask me to leave you. Don't ask me to return from following after you, for where you go, I'm going to go and where you lodge, I'm going to lodge. Your people, shall be my people and your God shall be my God, and where you're buried, I will be buried and may nothing but death separate the two of us." Wow. Naomi may have lost her husband and she may have lost her two weak and pining sons, but she got an awesome

daughter-in-law. Amen.

I'm going to stick with you. I'm going to give my life to believing in your God, to following your God and to honoring your God. This is one of the greatest examples of faith and belief and commitment and sacrifice in the entire Bible. Ruth's great faith. In spite of her sorrow, in spite of her difficult circumstances, she didn't grow bitter. She rather became better.

Now, Naomi goes back to the land and she's still bitter, but it couldn't very easily have been, Ruth could have said, I'm not going back. What did your God do for you? Your husband died. My husband died. I lost my father-in-law. I lost a brother-in-law. I lost my husband. I'm not going to go follow your God. The trials and hardships and difficulties of life can either make you better or they can make you bitter. You decide.

You've heard the old saying, "If life hands you a lemon, make lemonade." I like that statement that says the same son that melts wax, hardens clay. I've seen people go through the same trial and one person becomes bitter and angry and hard toward God. I've seen another person go through the same trial and they become soft and pliable and yielded and molded and shaped by the hand of God and they come out better rather than bitter.

I don't know what bitter experiences you've had in life, but I believe that as Christians, if we learn to trust God, and wait on God, and hope in God, and look to God, that through the bitter experiences of life, we can come out sweet, rather than come out bitter. You ever gone to minister to some old person in the rest home and they're cantankerous and bitter and angry and mad and just like, man, it's a scary thought.

Then, there's those other people that are in maybe a rest home or a bed of affliction and they just have the joy of the Lord in their face and the glow about them and they just exude blessing and joy because it doesn't mean that their lives have been free of sorrow, it means that they've learned how to trust God and hope in God and look to God and they found their joy in the Lord. What a difference Jesus can make in our lives. It's up to us whether we respond in bitterness or in blessing.

Ruth, and we know about Ruth today because of her standing for the God of Israel. She didn't blame God. She was not ashamed to confess her faith in God, even though she was a Gentile, she believed in God. This is another lesson that we learned from the Book of Ruth, that God loves and saves Gentiles.

I don't know about you, but I'm a Gentile. I praise God for that. That even we who were outside the covenant promises of Israel, and by the way, even the new covenant technically was made with the house of Israel. You and I are wild olive branches that are grafted in and we become beneficiaries of the blessings God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Don't think you're hot stuff. That's what Paul says in Romans, he says, "Be not high-minded but fear, you are a wild olive branch grafted in." If he can graft you in, he can take you out. Rather be humble and trust the Lord and be grateful for what God has done for you.

Ruth is a picture of salvation by grace. She was saved by God's grace, but the third thing that people do, in verses 19 to 22, wrong with their problems is they allow themselves to become bitter and they have the wrong disposition and then they blame God. You try to run from your problems, you can't do that. You try to cover your problems or your sins, you can't do that or they try to blame God for their problems. Why did God make me like this?

Verse 19, "They too went until they came to Bethlehem." It was about a 50-mile journey, two widows tramping through the desert. "They came to pass that when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them and they said, 'Is this Naomi?' She said unto them, 'Call me not Naomi,' which means pleasant or sweetness, 'Call me Mara, for the Almighty have dealt very bitterly with me.' She calls the Lord, El Shaddai, the Almighty, and she says, 'He's dealt bitterly with me.'"

She said, "I went out full," verse 21, "and the Lord or Jehovah brought me home again empty. When then call me, then call me Naomi saying the Lord hath testified against me. The Almighty El Shaddai hath afflicted me." Naomi returned and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which turned out of the country of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem," and I love this, "in the beginning of the barley harvest." That little statement at the end of chapter one, at the beginning of the barley harvest, that's one of the little indications again, God is working providentially. It just so happened it was harvest time.

Now, you that know the story of Ruth, it's hard to stop here because this is an awesome story. Go home tonight and read it before you go to bed. You know that from here, it moves into this whole harvest scene and it was providentially that they went back to Bethlehem at the time of harvest because guess what? Even though we are unfaithful, God is faithful. Even though we are flakes, that's not a Hebrew word, I just throw that out there, King Jimmy Flaketh, thou art flaketh.

God is faithful and he will always be faithful. I look over the years of my life and I think, God, how faithful, how good, how merciful, and how kind You have been to this big flake. I don't understand that. I only pray that God will make me blessable, that God will keep me right in the center of his will and my heart will be what God wants it to be, and I'll be obedient to God in every area of my life. Make me a blessing. Bless me and make me a blessing. Ruth was going to become that marvelous blessing.

When Naomi comes back to Bethlehem, everybody's above. Is that Naomi? Is that Naomi? Ten years and all the sorrows of life and she's older. She's probably bent over. She's a little more wrinkled. Her hair's a little more gray and she's got a walking stick and there's like, "Who's that?" It's like, "Shh." Is that Naomi? Where's Elimelech? What happened? Where's the boys?" She said, "Don't call me Naomi anymore. Call me Mara, bitterness, for the Lord has dealt bitterly with me."

I went out full verse 21, "And the Lord brought me home again empty. Why then call me Naomi saying, the Lord has testified against me. The Almighty has afflicted me." As I read that, I think,

Naomi, Naomi, Naomi, Naomi, Naomi, would to God, you only read the end of the book. She's still in chapter one. Isn't that frustrating? It's like if you could jump into the story like Naomi, it's going to be cool. It's going to be awesome. Just don't worry. Don't sweat. People could jump into the chapter you're in right now. Don't freak out. Don't worry. You're like, "Come to church on Wednesday night." "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. I'm bitter."

It's like you back away from them, "I'll leave you alone." I don't have a job. I don't have a wife. I don't have a husband. I don't have kids, or I have kids. Sorry, I shouldn't do that. My wife's always telling me, "You're going to make people think that it's not good to have kids." No, kids are a blessing, truly a blessing. For the record, let's get that on, let's get that on tape.

God, let me get sick or God let, do you know how many times as a pastor, I've had people sitting in my office just as bitter as can be? Why did God let my husband die? Why did God let my dad die? Why did God let my parents die? Why did God let my child die? Why did God let my friends die? Why did God let this happen? I don't know. I don't know.

What I do know is that God loves you and that God can redeem your life and God has a purpose and God has a plan. What I do know is that you can trust him. Don't try to run from your problem. Don't try to hide your sin or your problem, confess it and don't blame God. Jesus died on a cross for you. He actually suffered physical anguish and pain. He took shame and sin for you. How can you look at the cross of Jesus Christ and doubt that God doesn't love you, that God isn't working, that God doesn't have a plan?

I hope in a few months we'll do a series on Sunday morning in the life of Joseph and what a marvelous story that is, and how Joseph was thrown into a pit and abandoned by his brothers and forsaken and lied about, but yet God had a purpose and God had a plan, and Joseph says, "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good." Even in Naomi's life, her failures and her faults, as she turned away, God could redeem her. How it must grieve the Holy Spirit when we blame God for our problems, when in reality, God is weaving the tapestry of our lives, the dark threads the weaver needs. Trust him.

One of my favorite authors is FB Meyer, Frederick Meyer, and he says this about Naomi's statement, the Lord dealt bitterly with me. Listen to it. He says, "How grieved God's spirit must be, who is lovingly doing his best when he hears those words of murmuring and complaint. Let us lift the veil and notice the pleasant things in Naomi's life. Number one, her husband and sons were dead, but their deaths in a foreign land had left her free to come back to the God of Israel and to nestle again under the wings of Jehovah.

The death of her husband and sons drove her back to the land of Bethlehem where she nestled in the wings of Jehovah God. You can learn to thank God for the bitter things. They can be a friend to grace. They can drive you from the path of ease to storm the secret place you can be thankful for friends who failed to fill your heart's deep need. They can drive you to the savior's feet upon his love to feed. You can be thankful that through all life's way, that no one can satisfy, that you can find in God alone, your full and rich supply. She's saying bitterness, bitterness,

bitterness, bitterness and God had a purpose and a plan and could make pleasantness in her life."

Secondly, he said, "True, Orpah had gone back. Mahlon and Chilean were both buried in Moab, but she had a Ruth who was better to her than seven sons. True. She had no male child to perpetuate her name, but little Obed, would within a few months, be nestling in her aged arms and laughing at her withered face. True, she was very poor, but it was through her poverty that Ruth was brought first into contact with a good man, Boaz.

Yes, Naomi, like thousands more, must look back and take a look at their words, thou just deal bitterly with thine own happiness and leaving the land of promise for Moab, but God dealt pleasantly thee with thee. The bitterness that she was experiencing was brought on by her own disobedience and walking away from the land of promise, but God dealt pleasantly with thee and thy return, and the latter end. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him and upon them that hope in His mercy."

This is a marvelous, marvelous, marvelous story, the story of Ruth. As I said, when I opened up tonight, one of the themes that blesses me as much as the whole concept of redemption and the love relationship between Boaz and Ruth, is that God is working even in our sorrows, that God is working even in our dark times, even in our dark days, even in our affliction. He heals the brokenhearted. Amen.