

TURN IN YOUR BIBLES TO RUTH CHAPTER 1

Sometimes our life is radically changed in a moment – sometimes by very difficult situations such as the loss of a spouse, a child, a job, etc. Some things we might even describe as being worse than dying.

Today we are going to briefly look into the life of a wonderful woman who had everything and lost everything.

OUTLINE:

V. 1-5: When Tragedy Strikes

V. 6 – Returning to the house of bread

V. 13c – Anger toward God

V. 19-21 – Bitterness

V. 22 – Our end is often where we start to see God’s work

V. 1-5: When Tragedy Strikes

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 dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech (“God is King”), the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. ³Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. ⁴Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. ⁵Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. ¹

The word, Bethlehem means “house of bread”. Ironically, when this famine hit there was no bread to be had and so they left this area of Judah in the southern part of Israel to a place area called Moab.

- What a sad day for this family that has to leave their home and their land because of a famine.
- The details of what happened next are tragic and devastating. Naomi’s husband dies. We are not told how, but we are told that she was left with her two sons (V. 3).
- V. 4 seems to start off with what seems to be a spark of joy in her life as her two sons get married...
 - Could things start to be looking up. As she gets older, maybe she’s thinking she could live in a mother-in-law quarters on one of her son’s property his family. All this work of a single mom has been hard, but it finally seems to be paying off. But wait... Verse 5 brings even more tragedy:
- V. 5 says that both of her sons died and as is often the case at the end of an obituary, we have these heartbreaking words that describe Naomi’s broken state - **so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.**

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ru 1:1-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- No mother should ever have to bury her children.

These hardships are things that we wouldn't wish on anyone. But they happen all too often.

APPLICATION

Many, if not all of you watching have had a hard time in life. I'm sorry that you have had great difficulty and pain and sorrow.

I'm sure we have all had situations, though maybe not as devastating as Naomi's situation, when life gets hard...and then it gets harder.

- Just when you feel that all of your strength has been spent, only to face another trial, tragedy, or difficulty.
 - Our car breaks down then we lose our job.
 - One of our kids gets sick and we take care of them for a week until they get better only to have one of our other kids get sick right after (and then we get sick).
 - Someone dear to us dies unexpectedly then the family fights over your deceased loved one's possessions.

We ask questions like "Why God? Why is this happening to me?"

We can have some pretty terrible responses to tragedy such as turning away from God and turning to drugs, alcohol, pornography, isolation, or even thoughts of taking our own life.

But the truth is there is only one person who knows every detail of what's going on and that's God. And even though we don't understand the "why", He does and it's only in Him that we are going to find hope, peace, and answers.

V. 6 – Returning to the house of bread

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. Naomi hears of the famine being over in her hometown of Bethlehem and so she returns to it. She went out full and is returning very empty.

As I've already said, Bethlehem means "house of bread" and that is where Naomi is returning.

I can't help but think of Jesus who (in John 6:48) called Himself the "Bread of Life". He goes on to say in John 6:52 - ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.²

Maybe you have allowed tragedy and hardship to push you away from Jesus. Maybe your angry with God and you don't want to spend time in His Word or be with His people and so you've isolated yourself.

- If that's you I want to encourage you to return to Him because he truly is the Bread of Life. In Him there is life and peace even after you have experienced a hard life. God has a purpose for you even though you might feel broken and worthless. Sometimes the thing we need the most is the very thing we are running from.
- That is especially true when the thing we are running from is God.

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Jn 6:51). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

As Naomi sets her heart to return to Bethlehem, she urges her widowed daughters-in-law to leave her and to return to the home of their mother. And as she does, we see her brokenness and hurt even turn to anger toward the Lord:

V. 13c – Anger toward God

...No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!"³

We can easily feel that God doesn't hear us, care about us, or even that He is against us.

- It's in these times that we need to process our thoughts and make sure they line up with God's Word.
- Psalm 32:18 (NLT) - ¹⁸The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. ⁴
- We need to remember that we live in a perfect world we made bad – that the world is broken. (Gen. 1-3, Romans 5:12)
- We need to remember that God is near to all who call upon Him in truth (Psalm 145:18).
- That there's nowhere else we can go to find the words of eternal life (John 6:67-68).
- Not to forget the big picture – that we will be with God, if we love God, with no more pain, sorrow, or sin (Rev. 21:1-4).

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

-C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

It's in painful circumstances that we can truly realize what's important and where true hope and peace can be found – and that's only in God and His Word. May the painful heartaches of life bring you back to understand this truth.

V. 19-21 – Bitterness

¹⁹ Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

²⁰ But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"⁵

As Naomi comes into, she is obviously well known by the people there, but she looks very different than from when she left. She left with a husband and two sons and come's back only with a young lady who is the widow of one of her sons.

As the people look at her, she says, don't call Naomi ("pleasant"), call me Mara ("Bitter").

APPLICATION

If we are not careful we allow our circumstances to drive us to bitterness. Bitterness kills a person from the inside out. It poisons the water of life – every sip is painful and tainted. It can even kill our witness for the Lord.

"Naomi isn't thinking like a spiritual woman. When we don't go to God with our grief and suffering – we begin to sound like people who don't believe in God."⁶

-Ed Taylor

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ru 1:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ps 34:18). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ru 1:19–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ Taylor, ed. *God's Help for the Troubled Heart*. (2020).

For you believers, when life gets hard do you sound like an unbeliever?

- To my shame, I know I have.

Q: Why do we get bitter and even sound like an unbeliever when life gets hard?

A: Sometimes it's because we are not in our Bibles enough. Our quiet times have not been a priority. Our time with God has been absent. Our prayer life is nonexistent. Being out of fellowship with God's people. Sometimes we run from the "House of Bread" without realizing what we are doing.

- It's so easy to allow the busyness of life to push out the things of God, but what we need to remember is that we should always be preparing ourselves for the next battle.
- We often slack off in exercising ourselves toward godliness when times are good and then are somehow surprised when we get knocked off our horse in the next spiritual battle.

V. 22 – Our end is often where we start to see God's work

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.⁷

I want to leave you with this final verse by pointing out something very subtle. Even though Naomi couldn't see what the Lord was doing or how she was going to be taken care of, but God had a plan. And His plan to take care of this heartbroken woman starts in this town called the "The House of Bread" at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Little did she know that God was going to use her faithful widowed daughter-in-law to marry a good Jewish man who would redeem the family name, and bring honor back to her family.

I have found that when I am at my end, that is often where I start to see what God has been doing all the time.

APPLICATION

I hope this piece of history resonates with you today. Whether you find yourself flourishing in life or on the brink of despair, my encouragement to you is the same:

- Lean into God and His Word – bring Him your suffering and hardship. He loves you and wants to hear from you and He's closer than you think.

Come to the Bread of Life, taste and see that the Lord is good, and may you begin to see what He has been doing in your life all along.

I'll close with part of a prayer from a gal by the name of Ruth Harms Calkin –

*"...If I must struggle again
With aching exhaustion
With twisting pain
Until I am breathless
Until I am utterly spent
Until fear eclipses the last vestige of hope
Then, Lord –
Then grant me the enabling grace
To believe without feeling
To know without seeing
To clasp Your invisible hand
And wait with invincible trust
For the morning."*

-Ruth Harms Calkin, Tell Me Again Lord, I Forget

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ru 1:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Extra Notes:

⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

⁸ But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. ⁹ May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

¹⁰ "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? ¹² No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? ¹³ Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me."

¹⁴ And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. ¹⁵ "Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

¹⁹ So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. "Is it really Naomi?" the women asked.

²⁰ "Don't call me Naomi," she responded. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. ²¹ I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?"

²² So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Chapter 2