



## Silverdale Baptist

RUTH: BEAUTY FROM ASHES ~ FOR THE GOOD TO START, THE BAD MUST END.  
RUTH 1:7-21 ~ 06/3-4/2023

### Big Idea

For the good to start, the bad must end.

### Getting Started

#### **When have you needed a fresh start?**

Naomi needed a fresh start. Her husband and sons had died, leaving her with two foreign daughters-in-law living in a foreign land, Moab, a land and a people cursed by God.

When you find you have embraced what God has cursed, is it possible to start over? Naomi did. Let's see how that happened.

### Learn

**Leader,** You might quickly review the main points of Ruth 1:1-7 before you discuss this lesson. Last week we saw the context of Ruth. During the times of the Judges, Elimelech moved his family to Moab. There Elimelech's sons married Moabite women. Soon, Elimelech and both of his sons died. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law were widows in a harsh and challenging world.

## 1. A closure conversation.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 1:7-21

**Sum up Naomi's conversation with Ruth and Orpah.**

**How did Orpah respond to Naomi?**

Pastor Tony gave us three reasons some people will not follow Christ.

**Why some don't follow Christ?**

- They can't leave their family.
- They can't leave the familiar.
- They can't leave their false faith.

**Take a moment to discuss these reasons and ask the class for examples. But be mindful of your time.**

## 2. A complete conversion.

***Leader** Ruth speaks for the first time in this book in 1:16-17. We shouldn't miss the significance of Ruth's first words.*

**How did Ruth respond to Naomi?**

**How did Ruth's response reflect a complete conversion to Christ? Specifically, how does Ruth's response illustrate repentance?**

## 3. A concerned community.

**When Naomi returns to Bethlehem, what do we learn about her pain?**

**Who does Naomi blame for her suffering?**

## Apply

**The Moabites worshiped Chemosh. Who do you worship?**

**If you are not a follower of Christ, what keeps you from walking away from the world and walking after Christ?**

**After everything Naomi went through, she named herself *Bitter*. If your name described your history and your circumstances, what would you call yourself?**

**If you are hurting and broken, who are you blaming?**

**What needs to happen in your life to put you in a position to be blessed by God? Orpah refused to leave her old life. Ruth turned from everything she knew to follow God. Naomi was broken but returned to where she knew God's provision was.**

**Which one describes you?**

**Who or what do you need to walk away from in order to follow Christ?**

## Pray

Father, we all know for the good to start, the bad must stop. But, we still find ourselves hanging on to things we know we shouldn't and hoping You will bless us anyway. Father, give us the faith to let go of everything and follow hard after You.

## Dig Deeper

### Ruth 1:6–18

We need to consider the three testimonies that are in this section.

*The testimony of Naomi (Ruth 1:6–15).* God visited His faithful people in Bethlehem, but not His disobedient daughter in Moab. Naomi heard the report that the famine had ended; and when she heard the good news, she decided to return home. There is always “bread enough and to spare” when you are in the Father's will (Luke 15:17, KJV). How sad it is when people only *hear* about God's blessing, but never experience it, because they are not in the place where God can bless them.

Many years ago, I was in a prayer meeting with a number of Youth for Christ leaders, among them Jacob Stam, brother of John Stam who, with his wife Betty, was martyred in China in 1934. We had been asking God to bless this ministry and that project, and I suppose the word “bless” was used scores of times as we prayed. Then Jacob Stam prayed, “Lord, we've asked you to bless all these things; but, please, Lord, *make us blessable.*” Had Naomi been in that meeting, she would have had to confess, “Lord, I'm not blessable.”

Whenever we have disobeyed the Lord and departed from His will, we must confess our sin and return to the place of blessing. Abraham had to leave Egypt and go back to the altar he had abandoned (Gen. 13:1–4), and Jacob had to go back to Bethel (35:1). The repeated plea of the prophets to God's people was that they *turn* from their sins and *return* to the Lord. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

Naomi's decision was right, but her motive was wrong. She was still interested primarily in food, not in fellowship with God. You don't hear her confessing her sins to God and asking Him to forgive her. She was returning to her land but not to her Lord.

But something else was wrong in the way Naomi handled this decision: *She did not want her two daughters-in-law to go with her.* If it was right for Naomi to go to Bethlehem, where the true and living God was worshiped, then it was right for Orpah and Ruth to accompany her. Naomi should have said to them what Moses said to his father-in-law, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel” (Num. 10:29, KJV). Instead, Naomi tried to influence the two women to go back to their families and their false gods.

Why would a believing Jewess, a daughter of Abraham, encourage two pagan women to worship false gods? I may be wrong, but I get the impression that Naomi didn't want to take

Orpah and Ruth to Bethlehem *because they were living proof that she and her husband had permitted their two sons to marry women from outside the covenant nation*. In other words, Naomi was trying to cover up her disobedience. If she returned to Bethlehem alone, nobody would know that the family had broken the Law of Moses.

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13, NKJV). When we try to cover our sins, it’s proof that we really haven’t faced them honestly and judged them according to God’s Word. True repentance involves honest confession and a brokenness within. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17). Instead of brokenness, Naomi had bitterness.

The tragedy is that Naomi did not present the God of Israel in a positive way. In Ruth 1:13, she suggests that God was to blame for the sorrow and pain the three women had experienced. “It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has gone out against me!” (v. 13, NIV) In other words, “I’m to blame for all our trials, so why remain with me? Who knows what the Lord may do to me next?” Had Naomi been walking with the Lord, she could have won Orpah to the faith and brought two trophies of grace home to Bethlehem.

*The testimony of Orpah (Ruth 1:11–14)*. The two daughters-in-law started off with Naomi (v. 7), but she stopped them and urged them not to accompany her. She even prayed for them (vv. 8–9) that the Lord would be kind to them and find them new husbands and give them rest after all their sorrow. But of what value are the prayers of a backslidden believer? (Ps. 66:18) Three times Naomi told Orpah and Ruth to return (Ruth 1:8, 11–12).

When she saw them hesitating, Naomi began to reason with them. “I’m too old to have another husband and bear another family,” she said. “And even if I could bear more sons, do you want to waste these next years waiting for them to grow up? You could be in your mother’s house, with your family, enjoying life.”

Orpah was the weaker of the two sisters-in-law. She started to Bethlehem with Naomi, kissed her, and wept with her; yet she would not stay with her. She was “not far from the kingdom” (Mark 12:34, NIV), but she made the wrong decision and turned back. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but we wonder whether her heart was really in it; for her decision proved that her heart was back home where she hoped to find a husband. Orpah left the scene and is never mentioned again in the Scriptures.

*The testimony of Ruth (Ruth 1:15–18)*. Naomi was trying to cover up; Orpah had given up, but Ruth was prepared to stand up! She refused to listen to her mother-in-law’s pleas or follow her sister-in-law’s bad example. Why? *Because she had come to trust in the God of Israel (2:12)*. She had experienced trials and disappointments, but instead of blaming God, she had trusted Him and was not ashamed to confess her faith. In spite of the bad example of her disobedient in-laws Ruth had come to know the true and living God; and she wanted to be with His people and dwell in His land.

Ruth’s conversion is evidence of the sovereign grace of God, for the only way sinners can be saved is by grace (Eph. 2:8–10). Everything within her and around her presented obstacles to her faith, and yet she trusted the God of Israel. Her background was against her, for she was from Moab where they worshiped the god Chemosh (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7, 33), who accepted human sacrifices (2 Kings 3:26–27) and encouraged immorality (Num. 25). Her circumstances were against her and could have made her bitter against the God of Israel. First, her father-in-law died, and then her husband and her brother-in-law; and she was left a widow without any support. If this is the way Jehovah God treats His people, why follow Him?

Ruth dearly loved her mother-in-law, but even Naomi was against her; for she urged Ruth to return to her family and her gods in Moab. Since Elimelech and Mahlon were now dead, Ruth was technically under the guardianship of Naomi; and she should have obeyed her mother-in-law's counsel. But God intervened and graciously saved Ruth in spite of all these obstacles. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5, NKJV). God delights in showing mercy (Micah 7:18), and often He shows His mercy to the least likely people in the least likely places. This is the sovereign grace of the God "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4, KJV).

Ruth's statement in Ruth 1:16–17 is one of the most magnificent confessions found anywhere in Scripture. First, she confessed her love for Naomi and her desire to stay with her mother-in-law even unto death. Then she confessed her faith in the true and living God and her decision to worship Him alone. She was willing to forsake father and mother (2:11) in order to cleave to Naomi and the God of her people. Ruth was steadfastly "determined" to accompany Naomi (1:18) and live in Bethlehem with God's covenant people.

But there was a divine law that said, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the Lord forever" (Deut. 23:3, NKJV). This meant permanent exclusion. How then could Ruth enter into the congregation of the Lord? By trusting God's grace and throwing herself completely on His mercy. Law excludes us from God's family, but grace includes us if we put our faith in Christ.

When you read the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 4, you find the names of five women, four of whom have very questionable credentials: Tamar committed incest with her father-in-law (Gen. 38:3); Rahab was a Gentile harlot (Josh. 2:5); Ruth was an outcast Gentile Moabitess (Ruth 1:5); and "the wife of Uriah" was an adulteress (2 Sam. 11:6). How did they ever become a part of the family of the Messiah? Through the sovereign grace and mercy of God! God is "long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV). (Mary is the fifth woman in the genealogy, and she was included because of God's grace and her faith. See Luke 1:26–56.)

### **3. Bitterness: blaming God for our trials (Ruth 1:19–22)**

The two widows probably visited the three graves of their loved ones for the last time before leaving Moab. Then they committed themselves to the Lord and set out to begin a new life. It would be interesting to know what Naomi and Ruth talked about as they journeyed from Moab to Bethlehem. Did Naomi give her daughter-in-law some basic instruction in the Law of Moses? Did Ruth ask questions about the Jewish faith, the Jewish people, and her new home in Bethlehem? We wonder what kind of answers Naomi would have given since she was a bitter woman with a faltering faith in the God of Israel.

Naomi had been away from home for ten years, and the women of the town were shocked when they saw her. (In v. 19, the pronoun of "they said" is feminine.) Their question "Is this Naomi?" suggests both surprise and bewilderment. The name Naomi means "pleasant," but she was not living up to her name. She was not the Naomi whom they had known a decade before. Her ten difficult years in Moab, and the sorrows they had brought, had taken their toll on Naomi's appearance and personality. Instead of making her better, the trials of life had made her bitter, which is the meaning of the word *mara*.

We can't control the circumstances of life, but we can control how we respond to them. That's what faith is all about, daring to believe that God is working everything for our good even when we don't feel like it or see it happening. "In everything give thanks" (1 Thes. 5:18) isn't always easy to obey, but obeying this command is the best antidote against a bitter and critical spirit. The Scottish preacher George H. Morrison said, "Nine-tenths of our unhappiness is selfishness, and is an insult cast in the face of God." Because Naomi was imprisoned by selfishness, she was bitter against God.

To begin with, she accused the Lord of dealing very bitterly with her (Ruth 1:20). She had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons and had come home without them. She had gone to Moab possessing the necessities of life, but now she had returned home having nothing. She was a woman with empty hands, an empty home, and an empty heart. Because she didn't surrender to the Lord and accept His loving chastening, she did not experience "the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11).

Not only had the Lord dealt bitterly with her, but He had also testified against her in these afflictions (Ruth 1:21). Is this Naomi's confession of sin, her admission that she and her family had sinned in going to Moab? Is she hinting that they deserved all that they had suffered? Twice Naomi called God "the Almighty," which is the Hebrew name El Shaddai, "the All-powerful One" (vv. 20–21). It's one thing to *know* God's name and quite something else to *trust* that name and allow God to work in the difficult situations of life. "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Ps. 9:10, NKJV). Naomi knew the name but did not exercise the faith.

But was Naomi really that poor and empty? Or was she simply exaggerating her situation because she was weary of body and bitter of soul? Just think of the resources she had that should have encouraged her.

For one thing, she had *life*; and this in itself is a precious gift from God—a gift we too often take for granted. Naomi left three graves back in Moab, but God in His goodness had kept her alive and brought her back to Bethlehem. "Fear not that your life shall come to an end," said John Henry Newman, "but rather that it shall never have a beginning." Naomi thought that life had ended for her, but her trials were really a new beginning. Naomi's faith and hope were about to die, but God had other plans for her!

Naomi not only had life, but she also had *opportunity*. She was surrounded by friends, all of whom wanted the very best for her. At first, her sorrow and bitterness isolated her from the community, but gradually that changed. Instead of sitting looking gloomily at a wall, she finally decided to look out the window; and then she got up and opened the door! When the night is the darkest, if we look up, we can still see the stars.

One of Naomi's richest resources was *her daughter-in-law Ruth*. In fact, it is Ruth whom God used and blessed throughout the rest of this book; for Ruth was a woman who trusted God and was totally committed to Him. Naomi soon learned that God's hand of blessing was on this young woman and that He would accomplish great things through her obedience.

But most of all, Naomi still had *Jehovah, the God of Israel*. The Lord is mentioned about twenty-five times in this brief book, for He is the Chief Actor in this drama whether Naomi realized it or not. "I firmly believe in Divine Providence," said President Woodrow Wilson. "Without it, I think I should go crazy. Without God the world would be a maze without a clue." When we fear God, we need not fear anything else. On his deathbed, John Wesley said, "Best of all, God is with us!" God is not only *with* us, but He is also *for* us; and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, KJV)

It was barley harvest when the two widows arrived in Bethlehem, a time when the community expressed joy and praise to God for His goodness. It was spring, a time of new life and new beginning. Alexander Whyte often told his Edinburgh congregation that the victorious Christian life is “a series of new beginnings,” and he was right. Naomi was about to make a new beginning; for with God, it’s never too late to start over again.

Are you trusting God for *your* new beginning? After all, with God at your side, your resources are far greater than your burdens.

Stop staring at the wall and, by faith, get up and open the door to a brand-new tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*Be Committed\*](#), “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 17–25.