

Session 13 Pictures of the Bride: Ruth, Part 1

INTRODUCTION

These are sessions 13 and 14 of “Pictures of the Bride in the Old Testament,” and we’re looking at Ruth tonight. Turn to page 3. We broke down twenty-three different sections. Again, Ruth is a Gentile living among the Jewish community. The Lord is calling forth a bride out of the Gentile nations. That’s the message of the book of Ruth. Esther is a Jewish woman living among a Gentile community. It’s exactly opposite, because both situations have occurred many times in history.

There are a lot of different angles to it. The real heart of the book of Esther is ruling and reigning with the King. The real heart of the book of Ruth is that the bride comes out of a desperate, hopeless, forsaken, poverty-stricken people who seem as though they have no hope in the natural. The real message of Ruth is hope for those who have no hope; and obviously, that’s most of history.

“HE HAS CAST DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR THRONES, AND EXALTED THE LOWLY”

Esther, again, takes a very different angle: learning to rule and reign and triumph over enemies. The book of Ruth is really pointing out the desperate plight of the human race and the finale in terms of God’s purpose if they’ll only say yes to Him.

One of the examples I like to use from the New Testament is Luke 16:20. It’s the story of the beggar Lazarus. I’ve used this several times in Sunday morning meetings. Lazarus, this beggar, is begging outside the rich man’s gate. He’s full of sores, and the dogs are licking them. He has no friends, no family, no hope. He dies and the angels bring him to Abraham’s bosom. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, he’s brought into the paradise of God. This beggar goes from the lowest position possible on the earth, though he had a high hope in God, to the highest position in all the created order, right under the Trinity, over all the angels and archangels. That’s the message of Ruth, from the very lowest to the very highest.

There are two main locations: the country of Moab and the city of Bethlehem. Here’s a summary of the story. It’s one of the greatest, most famous loves stories in all history, either sacred or secular. They study it in the secular arena as well. It’s a fantastic love story. It’s set in the time of the judges. The judges ruled in Israel’s history from about 1200 to about 1020 BC. It begins with a Jewish family who lived in Bethlehem in approximately 1100 BC. David lived in around 1000 BC. He lived a few generations after Ruth, because, as we know, David actually is of the line of Ruth.

Here’s what happens. This Jewish family is living in Bethlehem in a time of famine. They flee Bethlehem; they flee Israel, because the famine is destroying all the food and the produce. It’s the cycle of Deuteronomy 28 where God says there will be judgment if the nation is disobedient. That’s what’s taking place, and so they leave the nation of Israel. They go to a foreign nation, the nation of Moab.

Hardship destroys the family. Three of the men in the family end up dying premature deaths. Naomi returns to Israel as a poverty-stricken widow. She returns to the purpose of God, but in her poverty-stricken state. The good news is that God takes her and puts her in the position of royalty. That’s the allegorical interpretation. Naomi and Ruth, together, are in the line of royalty; that’s the point. Ruth then meets a very wealthy Jewish man named Boaz who happens to be a relative of Ruth, because she was in the family of Elimelech and Naomi.

This Moabite woman, Ruth, marries this wealthy Jewish man, Boaz, who happens to be, again, a relative through marriage. Ruth marries him. Everything is restored. She gets to spend all of his money and everyone lives happily ever after.

THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

The three main characters of the book. First, there's Naomi. Speaking allegorically, Naomi is a type of the Church. I won't give all the qualifications for the allegory this time; I've already done it twice. It's a type of the Church in compromise under the discipline of God. That's what Naomi speaks of: the Church is in compromise; the Church is carnal. The discipline of God comes upon the Church, upon Naomi, and she's restored; she's brought to full repentance. Then in her full repentance she's fully restored. It's Jesus knocking on the church of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:20). He's knocking on the door. He says, "You think that you're full, but you're empty. That's your problem. You think things are good, but they're really desperate" (Rev. 3:17, paraphrased).

He knocks on the door of the Laodicean church, where Naomi is. When the Lord knocks on the door, He knocks on the door in a number of ways. One way He knocks is with discipline. Another way He knocks is with revelation of who we are. He knocks on the door with demonstrations of power. I like to think of the sovereign knock. The loudness of God's knock is going to wake up the Church. Well, God was knocking on the door of Naomi's life and finally He got through.

AN INVITATION TO A WEDDING SUPPER AND A ROYAL THRONE

The Lord's knock involves not just the negative of discipline; it involves the positive of revelation. He releases revelations of who we are before Him, which awakens us. Then when He knocks on the door, He releases great power. When the Lord knocked on the door of the Laodicean church, to what did He invite them? To a supper with Himself. The supper to which He's inviting the Laodicean church is actually the marriage supper of the Lamb. That's the supper to which the Lord wants to invite the people of God.

Then in the next verse, Revelation 3:21, He invites the Church to sit on a throne. He says, "Even as I sit on My throne, so you will sit with Me on My throne" (Rev. 3:21, paraphrased). To the most carnal church of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, He gives an invitation to a wedding supper and a royal throne.

That's what the Lord's doing to Naomi. He's knocking on the door, but first it's the knock of discipline. Then there's a revelation of God's purpose, and then there's the full power and blessing of God. Naomi ends up at the table and on the throne before the thing is over. That's the church of the twentieth century in terms of our lifetime. We're Naomi and the Lord is knocking on our door, and there's discipline, revelation, and power waiting to be released.

The good thing about Naomi is that she ends up in full restoration. She does. The Lord gets His people where He wants His people. Ruth speaks of the bride again. She's a hopeless, poverty-stricken widow. She's outside the course of the Word of God. She's a foreigner to the promises of God and yet she's not out of God's reach. That's the point. The most broken down, perverted, desolate person in the earth isn't outside of the reach of the promise of God.

In a moment, we'll talk about how Moab was a special enemy of Israel. It wasn't just an enemy, it was one of the special enemies of Israel, and she was a Moabite woman. She's not out of the reach of God's promise. She can be brought in. Everyone can come; that's the goodness of it. Boaz is the wealthy land owner filled with

kindness. He's the wealthy land owner. He's the righteous Jewish man dwelling in the land, obeying the laws of God, filled with kindness. Obviously, he's a type of Christ wanting to redeem the poor Gentile nations, the poor, hopeless Gentiles.

The good news is that this poor, hopeless, outside-of-the-will-of-God Gentile was beautiful to Boaz. The Gentile nations are beautiful to the Lord. When I say Gentile nations, I'm talking about the context of Ruth. The Gentiles were the enemies of God, and that's the context out of which I'm speaking.

THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD IS THE MARK OF THE FATHER'S LOVE

The story begins with Elimelech responding in a wrong way to divine discipline. It reveals Naomi enduring this discipline and finally embracing it in coming back to the Lord. Look on the next number of pages in your handout: the message of chapter 1, of this entire first chapter, is that Ruth, even in her beginning stage, must be able to say yes to the discipline of God. One of the most offensive and troubling things is that when the discipline of the Lord comes upon us to bring us to full redemption, many of God's people back up in bitterness and say no to the Lord. Instead of running to Him and embracing His discipline, they don't understand that the discipline of the Lord is the mark of the Father's love upon His people—the mark of the Father's love. When you're disciplined there may be shame and pain for a season. You can be sure of one thing: you have the mark of Abba upon your life, because He disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:5-6).

One of the main themes of chapter 1 is the bride in the early stages. Of course, the whole Church is the bride, but Naomi is the part of the Church that walks with the bride's heart. You understand that none of us are the bride in the full sense until eternity, and then all of us are; but our goal of understanding the bridal theology in this age is to walk with the heart of the bride. But only a small percentage of the Church is seeking to walk in the heart of the bride. That's why we're having this teaching: to begin to cultivate that amongst the Church in the nations. Out of tens and hundreds of millions, God is now wooing millions to say yes to the bridal heart.

One of the number one issues to which we have to say yes, to which Ruth says yes, is the times of divine discipline. Every single one of us will be divinely disciplined a number of times in our life. It's not the same thing as punishment.

“A CERTAIN MAN OF BETHLEHEM . . . WENT TO DWELL IN THE COUNTRY OF MOAB”

“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” (Ruth 1:1).

That might be just a nice verse, but when it says, “. . . went to dwell in the country of Moab,” that's disaster. It's like saying, “There was a nice Jew who lived in Europe, and he went to dine with Adolf Hitler.” If you're not living in that time, it doesn't strike you. You have to understand, Moab was the archenemy of Israel, but it certainly would have struck a Jewish believer hearing this story in the Old Testament. They would have said, “My goodness! Why did they go to Moab?”

THE FIVEFOLD CYCLE OF BLESSING AND JUDGMENT

This was in the days when the judges ruled—in the period right before the kings of Israel. The first king was Saul, and the second was David. The kings began to rule right after the period of the judges. Again, this is taking place in about 1100 BC.

The book of Judges records the spiritual, moral, and political cycles the people of Israel went through. Here I have the fivefold cycle of blessing and judgment that you find in the book of Judges. The nation of Israel went through it, but what's more important is that Elimelech and his family was going through this cycle. It's a cycle that we go through as well in the Body of Christ. The Church throughout history has gone through it corporately, and individually some of us go through this as well.

We'll look at verse 21 a few times. When Naomi finally comes back to Bethlehem, she says, "I went out full and the Lord has brought me home again empty. The Lord has afflicted me" (Ruth 1:21, paraphrased). This is her confession when she returns some time after this first verse, over ten years later. She left Bethlehem full. She was wealthy, and she had honor in the community. She left Israel full, in a time of blessing. She was rich.

DIVINE DISCIPLINE DESCENDS WHEN WE HAVE CONFIDENCE TO COMPROMISE

Then, here's the next cycle in Judges, and it happened to the family of Elimelech. Pride came in. They began to take the blessing of God for granted. In their pride, they were no longer afraid to sin. They said, "Man, everything's going so great! Nothing can go wrong!"

Number one: they moved to Moab. That's a significant compromise. Number two: the two sons were involved in mixed marriages, which are strictly forbidden by the Word of God.

What happens in Judges is that people get blessed, they feel a little proud, and then they start compromising. They have confidence to compromise. They think, "Man, I'm on top of the world." It's pride, but we'll just call it "confidence to compromise."

Then, divine discipline comes. Typically, it comes in different season. In the life of Elimelech's family, it came in two different seasons. First, Elimelech died, and then ten years later the two sons died. Naomi finally said, "OK, OK, I get the message." There had been three deaths in the family. Again, she said, "I left full, and I came home empty." She was completely bankrupt when she returned home at the end of this cycle.

Then, after that, Israel and the judges would become desperate. You can add the word *repentance*. They prayed for help in repentance and desperation. What happened was that Naomi heard news of a revival; she heard that there was a visitation of God in Israel. Actually, it was bread. The famine was over, but allegorically speaking it's the bread. God is serving bread, hot bread, to His people again. It speaks of a season of revival. She heard the news, felt hope, repented, and returned; she made herself totally right with God.

Chapters 2-4 describe divine deliverance. Those are the final three chapters of this four-chapter story. Tremendous divine deliverance and full restoration took place.

Then what happens is that under the blessing the Israelites would fall back into pride. They grew comfortable and sinned again. This cycle was repeated over and over in the book of Judges. It's exactly what happened in Elimelech's life. It happens to a lot of believers. It's happened throughout church history. Moab is a place of compromise. It's a place where God is dishonored instead of sought. There was no tabernacle to worship God in Moab. They could never keep the law to appear before Israel three times a year. They were completely out of the cycle of the worship pattern in the nation of Israel. It was a nation full of idols. The Moabites were long-term enemies of Israel and of God. As a matter of fact, there was a special law in Deuteronomy 23:3, where God says especially, "You can't end up being friends with Moab because of the way they've treated Israel at

various moments in Israel's history" (Deut. 23:3-4, paraphrased). Moab was completely outside the covenant blessings of God. Moab speaks of the place of compromise.

GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS ALWAYS REDEMPTIVE BECAUSE GOD LIKES US

"There was a famine in the land of Israel." Israel came under divine discipline. You can write, "Deuteronomy 28." God warned them, "If you disobey Me, I will get your attention through divine discipline." God's discipline isn't the same as God's punishment. God's discipline is always redemptive because God likes us. God disciplines us because we have won His heart. Punishment isn't given to redeem us, to bring us back around to full blessing; punishment is for destruction. God punishes the unrighteous nations that stand against Him, as we see at the end of the time. Nations were completely destroyed. Babylon never rose again because it was destroyed through punishment, not through discipline. The saints aren't punished; we don't have to fear the wrath of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:8-9 says that we're not destined for wrath. The saints aren't destined for wrath, but are partakers of divine discipline. Again, discipline demonstrates tremendous desire for us.

THERE'S NO SENSE OF REJECTION IN THE CORRECTION OF GOD

Here's a very interesting thing about divine discipline: when God disciplines His children, He has no rejection in the discipline. He actually enjoys us while He's correcting us. He doesn't enjoy the correction, but He enjoys the very people He's correcting.

The reason I say that is because we get confused. Most people who correct reject with anger the person they are correcting. They come in and they say to their children, "This is the last time I'm going to tell you! I'm sick and tired of you!" Correction almost always means rejection with anger. We end up with an idea that God does this. God says, "I do correct you. I actually disagree with areas of your life, but I'm impassioned and I enjoy you and I love you and long for you." There's no sense of rejection in the correction of God. Of course, the goal for us as believers is to be able to bring correction in the areas of responsibility with the embrace that comes alongside God's correction. When God corrects, He embraces while He's correcting. When man corrects, he rejects with anger, but God does not.

"DESPISE NOT THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE DISCOURAGED"

Israel was under divine discipline, and what should have happened is that Elimelech should have stayed there and endured divine discipline and said yes and repented, but he fled because he didn't want to lose his money because there was famine in the land. He said, "God is drying up the brooks here. I will flee. I will keep my money. I don't care about walking with God right now, because He's messing up the economy. I will go somewhere else where His hand won't reach me."

The Lord said, "Man, that's not good. My hand can reach anywhere." Elimelech went to the country of Moab. That's a totally wrong response to divine discipline. He fled the discipline. It's a critical mistake. The consequences ended up affecting his entire family.

We cannot flee the discipline of God. The Scripture tells us in Hebrews 12:2 to endure it. It actually gives us three instructions for responding to divine discipline. It says, "Don't take the discipline of God lightly" (Heb. 12:5, paraphrased).

Some people treat divine discipline lightly. They say, "Oh, it's just the devil doing it."

God says, “Don’t write Me off. Don’t take it lightly. Don’t put it in the devil’s court as an attack of the devil.”

He says, “But on the other hand, don’t take it too hard. Don’t lose heart” (Heb. 12:5b, paraphrased). “Don’t lose heart.” In other words, “Don’t quit.”

Some people say, “It’s not that I take it lightly; it’s the opposite. I’m crushed by it. I have no hope. It’s over. I’ll never walk with God again. I’ll never, ever walk in what God promised again.”

He says, “No! You’re crushed by My discipline. Don’t be crushed by it.” He says, “Don’t take it lightly. Don’t just write it off as the devil. Don’t quit by being crushed by it.” He says, “Rather, endure it. Just endure it. It will bear fruit in your life” (Heb. 12:7, paraphrased). In other words, “Stay humble, reach to God, and let it work its course.” The full restoration will come in due time. I get tempted either to take it lightly or to get crushed by it, but the answer is to endure it.

Elimelech didn’t do that. He fled. He didn’t want the economy of Israel under a famine to mess up his wealth. He left the nation and fled to a place of compromise. The reason I’m spending time on this subject is because it’s so critical. It’s absolutely one of the first issues for the bride being prepared in the book of Ruth. It’s one of the absolute first issues that’s being addressed.

Here’s the reason: we need to take the four pictures of the bride—Eve, Esther, Ruth, and Rebekah. You have the whole thing laid out there. We can’t avoid or neglect any of the key principles in any of these four pictures of the bride, because they’re all there.

THE DISCIPLINE INTENSIFIES IN THE PURPOSES OF GOD

Multiplying discipline. Ruth 1:2-5. “The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion . . . of Bethlehem . . . And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons” (Ruth 1:2-3).

Suddenly, there was tragedy, and not every time someone dies is it an act of divine discipline. Don’t think everything negative is divine discipline. Sometimes it’s the enemy, but if you’re in defiant rebellion against the Word of God, it’s probably wise to think of it as the Lord getting your attention.

Of course, we know the Lord can use the enemy as well. You don’t want to start thinking that every tragedy is somehow God’s displeasure over your life, because that’s not true at all. Just ask the Lord to speak to you and He’ll make it clear to you. Then ask other people in council to help you, because this is a very important issue to get clear.

Anyway, this tragedy strikes in verse 3, and her husband dies. Some time passes, and they don’t repent. They take wives of the Moabite women. We think, “No! Go back to Israel. Get the message.” No, they break the Word of God even further. “The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years” (Ruth 1:4). That’s plenty of time to repent.

At the end of the ten years, the two sons die. We’re left with three widows at the end of this season of their lives. It’s getting worse and worse. The point is, the discipline is multiplying. The family went to the country of Moab and remained there. They’re continuing in compromise. The story begins with a Jewish family being

broken by remaining outside the will of God. That's how the story begins. Their family is utterly broken. Elimelech dies. In other words, the discipline becomes more difficult. The Lord wants this family. He wants to bring full restoration to them, and they turn away the hand of the Lord.

The reason we know it's discipline is because in chapter 1:21, Naomi makes it very clear, and she says in the Scriptures that the Lord Himself was afflicting them. We have revelation about this tragedy. It's very clear, it was a divine affliction. Deuteronomy 7:23 had warned them not to marry outside of the faith. There are verses in Nehemiah 10:30 and Ezra 9:2; there are quite a number of them. Instead of repenting with Elimelech's death, they actually violated the Word of God. Incidentally, these laws made Ruth's remarriage in Israel very improbable. These very laws, as she knew, were another barrier in front of her preventing her from going back with Naomi to the land of Israel.

Ten years: that's the number of testing. In Revelation 2:10, Jesus says He will test the earth for ten days—for ten seasons of time. The point is, they had plenty of time to repent before the two sons died. The Lord is saying, "I'm giving you time to repent. Tragedy has struck that's worse than the famine in Israel: your husband died. Now repent!" But they don't. They go on into disobedience, and tragedy strikes again. Again, the Lord is only trying to get their attention. The good thing about the Lord is, He'll give us the easiest and the quickest way to which we'll listen. I'm absolutely convinced of that. That doesn't mean it will be easy; but it *will* be the easiest and quickest way to get the job done. The Lord doesn't hang us over the torture chambers for the joy of it. He'll give us the shortest and the quickest path to a heart response. How many of you know that it's faster to say yes on the front end? The Lord loves you more than your ability to resist Him in the long run. It's insanity to want to resist Him, because He's only calling us into full bridehood, into full partnership with Himself. Every time He judges or brings discipline in our life it's a judgment, not really against us, but against Satan's kingdom. He's only judging sin. Sin is the only thing He's trying to get rid of in our lives. He's judging Satan's kingdom. Every time He releases a judgment on our life, it's not against us; it's for us and against the enemy.

THE LORD IN HIS MERCY GIVES TIME TO REPENT

Look at Revelation 2:21. It's the idea of being given time to repent. This is when Jesus appears to John the apostle and talks about Jezebel. This is amazing! He says, "I will give Jezebel time to repent" (Rev. 2:21, paraphrased). God even gives old Jezzie time to repent. He doesn't want to break anyone. He says, "No, if she would repent I would give her mercy." Is that not amazing? Sometimes the people take the time that God has given them to repent and they use it to compromise. They presume on the mercy of God.

The Lord says, "No, I'm just giving you time because I want to be as easy as possible. I don't want anyone hurt. I just want you loving; I want you dwelling in humility." I'm telling the Lord I want to do this thing as easily as possible. I imagine the Lord says, "That's been My plan from day one. I really will make it easier rather than harder if you'll go with Me." That doesn't mean there won't be discipline, because there's darkness in our hearts. The discipline can be as gentle as Him whispering. The Word of God speaking to our conscience is a subtle form of discipline. He's saying, "No." He's slapping our hand in a gentle way and calling us forward.

A friend comes to us and says, "You know, the Lord really showed me that you had better stop that."

The Lord says, "I'm just lifting My voice a little louder. I really don't want to do anything heavier than this."

All of a sudden a whole bunch of folks come crashing down. The Lord says, “I’m trying to get your attention. Listen!” The discipline of God really starts with the whisper of the Holy Spirit in our conscience. If we want to take that discipline, hey, let’s go with it. That’s the good one, right?

YOU’LL NEVER OUTFRAN THE INTENSITY OF GOD’S LOVE

Both Mahlon and Chilion die. The discipline gets worse. It intensifies. It strikes again. Again, this pain is designed to drive us into meekness and into love for God. In the end, she loses everything (Ruth 1:21). She says, “I came home empty.” She lost it all before she actually said yes. We don’t want to do it that way. Naomi did it the hard way. She was smart enough to say yes eventually.

It’s never too late to say yes. A lot of folks get bitter and say, “This is how You want to treat Me, God? Forget You! Forget You!” They lose heart and quit.

The result of this is three widows living in poverty in a foreign land where death is reigning. Listen: this is far worse than the famine in Israel ever would have been on their economy, on the economy of Elimelech’s family. Yes, they would have lost some money, along with the whole rest of the nation. Yes, they would have repented. It would never have ended in disaster if they had just submitted on the front end.

Discipline will intensify. Why? Because God’s love towards us is intense. People think, “Some day I will outrun this thing.” You’ll never outrun the intensity of God’s love, and the discipline will intensify.

NAOMI DIDN’T LOSE HER HOPE THAT MERCY WAS STILL AVAILABLE

Naomi’s hope and then repentance. Ruth 1:6-7. “Then 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” (Ruth 1:6). There it is: she arose to return. Why does she arise? “She had heard in the country of Moab.” In disobedience she heard the news; in the land of compromise the good news came, “The Lord is visiting His people.” Sometimes the Lord will allow you and me and others in the land of compromise to hear the good news, “I’m visiting My people afresh. I’m giving bread. The famine is over.”

Of course, allegorically speaking, we’re talking of fresh bread, which is the living Word of God, revelation, the power of the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit’s power upon the Word of God.

“Therefore”—and the *therefore* is key—“she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah” (Ruth 1:7). Naomi heard of God’s visitation back in the land. Hope was awakened. Faith was stirred. She’s been given a vision by the reports that God is moving. She says, “OK.”

YOUR SIN IS NEVER GREATER THAN THE MERCY OF GOD

Here’s the miracle. Here’s the really exciting part of Naomi: she believed that mercy was still available for her. She heard the good news. Some people hear the good news and say it’s too late. Somewhere in her heart she said, “I know the God of Israel will have mercy. I’m going back. I will face the fire. I will face the music when I get back.”

When she went back to her own town everyone knew what had happened. Talk about facing difficulty when she returned! That’s a few pages from now. She believed in the second chance or the twentieth chance or the fiftieth

chance with God. My point is this: some people think their sin is greater than the mercy of God. It's not. If your sin is greater than God's mercy, that means your heart is more powerful than His heart. If you repent, there's no sin greater than the mercy of God. He'll take you back. He absolutely will take you back. When Judas committed suicide, that was the ultimate act of pride because he was saying that his act of sin was stronger than God's act of mercy. Suicide for religious reasons, apart from a demon driving them to do it, is an act of pride before God: "I'm too big of a problem for You."

God says, "Listen peewee, you're not. My heart is far bigger than you are and My heart is far bigger than your sin is." The fact that she heard and believed was the beginning of humility right there. It takes humility to receive God's mercy. Amen? It says, "God is stronger and bigger than me." That's an act of humility, to be forgiven. That's one of the reasons why people aren't forgiven out in the world. They won't receive it because they think they're too bad. It seems humble, but it's false humility. It's pride. It says, "I'm bigger and more powerful than God's redemption."

The Lord says, "No, no. You're just a little man. You're well within My reach. Come back."

NAOMI HEARS THE KNOCK ON THE LAODICEAN DOOR

She starts with humility right there. Naomi *arose* to return. Repentance follows this hope. She came to her senses like the prodigal son. She's returning to God. She's heard the knock on the door. It's been ten years. Finally she hears the knock on the Laodicean door. "Yes! It's You."

He says, "It was Me the first time. I really want you to open the door."

Naomi "went out" from Moab. She went out from the land of compromise. There's action. This is my theory. When it was all said and done, Naomi said, "Living in Judah with God and famine is better than living in Moab with no God and no famine."

THE FIRST STEP TO THE BRIDAL HEART IS SAYING YES TO MERCY

I'll say that again. She found out the hard way that it was better to live in Judah with famine but with God. It was a lot better to live in Judah with famine but with God than to live in Moab, with no famine but no fellowship with God. Then the difficulty is tremendous. Elimelech should have left before he died. Well, he couldn't have left after he died. Anyway, Naomi could have. This is the first step to the bridal heart, that she says yes to mercy. She rises up with hope and takes action to repent, or follows repentance with action. She rose up to go. Her daughters-in-law were impacted. No doubt Naomi had been speaking about God to these two. There's a lot of spiritual language even in this first chapter. She's talking to them, and even as they're talking, there's a spiritual history they're sharing. Probably for some time she's been talking. She's been thinking about returning, and after the two boys die, she says, "Alright, I'm going back. That's all there is to it; I'm going back."

They rise up to return to the land of Judah. It's a journey of faith. It's a journey to get back there. It's only fifty miles in the natural from Moab to Bethlehem. It's only a fifty-mile walk, which might have taken less than a week to get there. The point is, it's a journey to return to the land of obedience again. She's buried her family and she's buried her broken dreams in the land of compromise, but she's ready to return now. The Lord has us do that. There are times when it's painful.

The Lord says, “I don’t like the pain, but you wouldn’t listen to My knock. You wouldn’t listen to My whispers. I love you too much to let you live out there.”

She buries her family. She buries her broken dreams in the land of compromise and she says, “I’m ready to return.”

NAOMI’S BLESSING ON HER DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

“And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept” (Ruth 1:8-9).

First, she says, “Go, return to your mother’s house.” Naomi frees them from any obligation to go on the journey of faith with her. She doesn’t want to be responsible for their decision. The reason she frees them is because she knows she’s going back to face God and she’s under the discipline of God. She doesn’t know what the future holds. She has no idea she’s going to fall into royalty, so to speak. There’s no king, so there’s no actual royalty at that time, but the wealthy man of the land was a picture of royalty ahead of its time, because there’s not a king for another few generations—first Saul and then David. She doesn’t want to be responsible, because as she says in Ruth 1:21, “I’ve been afflicted by the Lord. I can’t guarantee you guys anything. I don’t want to be responsible. I don’t want you getting halfway there and saying, ‘I don’t want to go.’ I’m going there to meet God again. You’re free. You don’t have to go with me. I’m going all the way back.” She says, “Return.”

One reason she tells them to return is that the Jewish nation was hostile to the Moabite people. The Jewish men were especially hostile to Moabite women, widows with no protection and no provision. She was in a very, very vulnerable place as a Moabite widow with no protector and no provision. She said, “No; I will pay the price. I will do whatever it takes to face God. I’ve had enough. He’s dealt bitterly with me and I’m going all the way. I will serve God fully no matter what it costs me, but I can’t give you any guarantees.”

She releases them. “The Lord deal kindly with you.” She blesses them. Naomi is another heart of the bride here; she sees God as her source.

A mother-in-law might have said, “Wait, wait. Time out. How about everything I did for your husbands and for you when you were with me? Wait, wait, you can’t abandon me now. I’m an older woman. I have no way to get income.”

Naomi was in really bad shape as an elderly widow with no ability to generate income. She was a wealthy woman at one time, so this is really hard on her because she’s not used to this lifestyle. She looks at them with no bitterness, because they leave her in a hopeless state. She says, “No, I free you. I free you.” A lot of people control others through bitterness. There’s no control going on. She says, “Go back. You’re free. I don’t want to call you into what I’m about to face unless you really have the heart for it.” There’s no control through bitterness. She kisses them. You see her meekness. You see her lack of bitterness. It’s powerful.

“They lifted up their voices and they wept together.” In other words, they really love Naomi. They’ve genuinely connected with Naomi’s heart. They aren’t just going through the motions; they say, “Naomi, we love you. We don’t want to leave you.” That’s why I think she had already spoken to them about the God of Israel. They had

such an affectionate relationship with her. It seems very believable to me that she was already beginning to speak her heart to them because of the bond that was between them.

NAOMI TESTS THE GENUINENESS OF THE FAITH OF HER DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

Naomi now tests the genuineness of her daughters-in-law, of their desire to have her faith. They said to her, “We’re going back. We’re with you to the end, all the way. We have heard your story. We’re going back to Judah with you. We don’t care what it costs us. We know we’re enemies of Israel. It doesn’t matter.”

Naomi said, “Turn back my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands” (Ruth 1:11)? She says, “Turn back, my daughters, go. I’m too old to have a husband.” “If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having your own husbands? No, my daughters; it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me” (Ruth 1:12-13).

In other words, “You’ve been troubled under my packaged deal from the Lord. You’re getting it too.” She says, “I’m very grieved that this has made the impact on your life that it has.”

“Surely we will return with you. We love you. We love your God. We’re with you to the end.”

She says, “You don’t understand what I’m going back to. You really don’t understand the shame and the reproach that I will face and my inability ever to generate any income. I have nothing to go back to. Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me?”

She wants to hear their answer. I think of the verse here in John 6:67 when Jesus looks at the twelve after all the multitudes had left Jesus because He said some offensive stuff. He says, “Go ahead and go.” He didn’t really want them to go.

Peter said, “Where are we going to go? You’re the only One who has the words of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68, paraphrased). “Where will we go? Back to fishing?” He says, “We can’t do that. There’s no point in it. You have the words of eternal life.”

This is what Naomi is doing. She has heard their cry, “We want to go back.”

She says, “I can’t be responsible for the turbulence that I might face in the next twenty years. I don’t have any idea. I couldn’t ruin the lives of these two young ladies. I love them too much.”

She wants to hear their answer. “Tell me why you want to go with me.”

Of course, the only good answer is, “I want to follow your God.” That’s the only answer that would strengthen them. She’s testing the genuineness of their commitment in verse 10.

She says, “I’m too old to have a husband.” In other words, “I don’t have any money and I’ll never have a family or an economic base again.” Women were in such a terrible position economically when they were widows. It was a horrible thing. She says, “All I have is God. I have nothing to give you. I can’t give you sons.” Obviously, they didn’t want her sons. Her point is, she’s appealing to the law in Deuteronomy 25:5. Deuteronomy 25:5

says that if a man died and his widow remained, his younger brother or his brother would marry the widow and take care of her.

The widow may say, “Forget you.” In those days it wasn’t like America. You didn’t have welfare lines and go get a job down at Dairy Queen or something. In those days being without a husband and a family was total despair economically. There was no welfare line to go to. It was a very, very hard life. The women might have looked at the old man and said, “Oh, this is going to be hard, but it’s better than starving.” They would never turn down the man even though they might not have had any emotion towards the man at all, because it really meant destitution for them. There are no sons coming along. In other words, circumstances will be difficult.

THE BRIDE’S SEVENFOLD COMMITMENT OF LOVE

The bride’s sevenfold commitment of love. Ruth clings. She clings to Naomi. She’s going to find the God of Israel with her. She says, “I’m with you to the end.” She says, “Entreat me not to leave you” (Ruth 1:16). “I don’t care how hard it will get. I’m not turning back from following after you.” She says, “For wherever you go, I will go; wherever 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. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:17).

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go, Naomi said, “OK, OK. It’s in your heart. It’s real. OK. I just wanted to know if it was real, because it will be tough.”

When Ruth says, “The Lord do so,” in verse 17, Ruth knows the Lord a little. Ruth has some introduction into the knowledge of God. It’s not just a natural thing she’s doing; she’s doing it to pursue God. “Entreat me not.” Ruth refused to be denied. She says, “You can’t deny me, Naomi. I’m going until I find God. I’m going with you. I don’t care what price I pay. I’m going until the end. I’ll be buried in the land of the God of Israel.”

Naomi says, “Wow! OK.” Again, Ruth isn’t just committed to Naomi. She’s committed to the God of Naomi. She makes that very clear at the moment when she says, “It’s my God. It’s not just your God; it’s my God that I’m after. He’s not only your God, but mine now.”

OBEDIENCE WITHOUT ANY REGARD FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Let’s look at the seven commitments. These seven commitments can be studied and talked about for hours. I challenge you to study these out. This is the bride’s heart. There’s no regard for circumstances. This is obedience with no regard for where it takes you. In a sentence, that’s what these seven choices are: they’re obedience without any regard to circumstances. According to what Ruth is thinking, these circumstances are horrible. The bride’s heart says, “I’ll obey without any regard to circumstance. It makes no difference. I’m in it for God. I’m burning all my bridges.”

Ruth never heard of Boaz. She didn’t know the end of the story at all. That’s how the Lord does it. He hides the ram in the thicket. In Genesis 22 when Abraham is marching up with Isaac to kill him, he says, “Lord, I’ll do it. I swear I’ll do it. I don’t understand.” He pulls the knife out in Genesis 22 and the angel stops him and says, “The Lord wanted to see if you feared Him. There’s a ram in the thicket” (Gen. 22:12-13, paraphrased).

That's the true sacrifice. Little Isaac said, "That was a close call!" Of course, Abraham knew God would raise him from the dead. It says in Hebrews 11:19 that Isaac was a type of Christ who would die and be raised from the dead.

TRUSTING THE LORD TO KEEP US ON COLLAPSING BRIDGES

Ruth says, "Wherever you go, I will go." First, obedience, then Boaz: that's the divine order. First, obedience, then Boaz. I don't mean marriage; I mean the fullness, the full blessing of God. God has blessing for all of us, but He has a trial. He has a testing for us, a bridge that it scares us to walk across. But the Lord says, "Walk over it," and the blessing is on the other side.

We say, "Lord, what if the bridge collapses? It looks pretty shaky to me."

The Lord says, "I'll hold the bridge up. Now walk over it. Obey Me and you may lose everything. Obey Me and I'll give you full restoration." That's God's order.

Secondly, "Wherever you lodge, I will lodge." Remember, we're talking about a poor widow who has no place to lodge in Israel. She's going to lodge in the open field. They were wealthy when they went to Moab, so they've got a nice house in Moab. Now they're going to Israel. They're going to lodge and it's not going to be very nice where they're lodging in Israel.

"YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD, MY GOD"

Three: "Your people shall be my people." She's going to accept the people of God. These are the very people before whom Naomi is going to be reproached, and she's going to bear reproach when she returns. She's coming back. She went out wealthy and she's coming back poor. She went out with a nice family; she's coming back a widow. Undoubtedly, the people of Bethlehem warned her, "You're going to Moab? That's insanity!" Undoubtedly, they were challenging her, "Don't do it," and now she did it, and everything that could go wrong, went wrong. She's coming back completely empty. She's economically, socially, emotionally bankrupt, and completely empty as she returns. Her people are going to say, "Oh, Naomi is returning. Well, it's been ten, twelve, fifteen years since Elimelech died." I don't know how long they were in Moab before Elimelech died, but she's going to bear some reproach.

Four: "Your God will be my God." She says, in essence, "I'm not bitter towards the God of Israel who took my husband. I'm Yours, God. There's no bitterness." It's a personal commitment. It's "my God." It may be easy to be widowed and to be bitter at God, but Naomi says, "No, I'm going all the way. Nothing can stop me." The commitment is just astounding here. I wish we could take more time on it, but you can search it out and ask the Lord to show you stuff. These are some pretty serious seven commitments here.

"WHERE YOU DIE, I WILL DIE, AND THERE WILL I BE BURIED"

Five: "Where you die, I will die." It's not a short-term deal. She's not on a three-year missionary tour. She says, "I'll die there." It's a permanent obedience. "I'll never, ever return again. I've burned all the bridges. I'll never, ever return."

Six: "I'll be buried there." That speaks of her resolve to be remembered as a worshiper of God. It's like how kings would spend millions of dollars building their memorial, because the way you were remembered in your death was so important in that culture.

You say, “Well, that’s neat.” Here’s what you’ve got to remember. You’re a worshiper of God, but for her family in Moab to remember her as a worshiper of the God of Israel is a disaster for her heritage. Remember, she has aunts, uncles, cousins, and all those folks. She says, “I’m going down and I’ll be buried and in my burial the only thing I want on my tombstone is, ‘I obeyed the God of Israel.’”

Her family is saying, “This is crazy!”

She says, “All I want to be remembered for is my obedience to God.”

Again, to a God-fearing people, that’s a great thing. It’s a different thing altogether to the crowd they were hanging out with in Moab, because remember, they had a social network and friends and family, and she doesn’t know anyone in Israel yet, but she wants to be remembered only as a worshiper of God when it’s all said and done. “That’s where my burial will be.”

Seven: “The Lord do so to me.” Obviously, the solemn oath speaks of her sincerity, her full, permanent obedience. “Obedience or bust” is what she’s saying. She says, “It’s full obedience or bust. I’ll die doing it. I’m not turning back.”

Naomi saw her determination. Again, this wasn’t Ruth’s first reach towards God. Ruth knew a little about the Lord before this happened. She fully accepted Naomi’s challenge. She said, “I’m going all the way with you to the visitation. Nothing could turn me away. You can’t turn me away, Naomi. Orpah can’t turn me away with her unbelief. No one can turn me away. I’m going all the way to the end.”

ENDURING THE HUMILIATION OF DISCIPLINE

Enduring the humiliation of discipline. We’ve finished all of chapter 1, and now Ruth becomes the key figure in chapters 2, 3, and 4, so that the story moves much more fluidly in the last three chapters.

“Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem” (Ruth 1:19). I like that right there: “They went until...” They didn’t stop until they came to Bethlehem. “And it happened when they came to Bethlehem, that the city was excited” (v. 19b, paraphrased). The KJV says the city was *moved*. The word *excitement* here is not the right word. It’s not like they’re saying, “Yay, let’s have a celebration!” They’re emotionally stirred up; they’re having a frenzy. It’s like when someone says, “Don’t be so excited!” They were all stirred up when she came walking in, in the garb of a widow, poverty-stricken and broken. They said, “What’s happening?” The whole city was in an uproar. Again, Bethlehem was a fairly small town, so everyone knew them.

“And the women of the city said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ She said, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me’” (Ruth 1:19-20). She’s completely owning what has happened. There’s no blame-shifting. She’s not trying to retell the story with a little sugar on it. She says, “No, I’ll tell you exactly what happened. I disobeyed God. God’s hand is touching me. I’m going all the way through until I find Him again.”

Her humility is just unbelievable. Not very many people under the discipline of God ever admit it to themselves, let alone to their friends who are looking at them with a mocking look. She says, “I’m clean. It’s genuine,

authentic. This is what's happening: I'm going all the way straight to the center of what God's dealing with. I'm under His discipline, yes. I went out full, but the Lord has brought me home."

You can stop right there and say, "Praise God."

"He has brought me home, but He has brought me home empty. Why do you call me Naomi? The Lord has testified against me. He has afflicted me" (Ruth 1:21, paraphrased). Again, we know in the affliction of the Lord that the Lord has fantastic plans waiting to unfold. So we know that in the Lord's affliction there are still tremendous plans of restoration. Don't ever lose that.

We hear affliction and we don't hear restoration, but the whole book is about an afflicted one who is totally restored.

"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" (Ruth 1:22).

The two of them journeyed "until." Again, it's a fifty-mile walk. Nothing could stop them. They came until they arrived at Bethlehem, the house of bread. That's what it means. I love it. They went back to Bethlehem, back to the house of bread. They've gotten back to living by the Word of God. They're living by the Word of God. They're done with all this other, substitute stuff; they're living by the Word of God.

"CALL ME MARA, FOR THE ALMIGHTY HAS DEALT VERY BITTERLY WITH ME"

When they had come to Bethlehem, the city was moved because of them. Naomi had to endure so many opinions, I'm sure. Again, they had warned her. She has the shame of poverty. She has the testimony of being disciplined by God. Oh, man! What a tough spot to be in, but she knew she would find God is in the land of obedience.

The women said, "Is this Naomi?" They couldn't even recognize her.

Naomi had the courage to face the heat instead of covering it up. This is tremendous humility. "Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me." Again, there's a deep humility working in her heart. This is her new confession. "I went out full." This meant she had economic blessing and social honor. She was probably one of the most prominent women in the city fifteen years earlier. She went out full.

"THE LORD HAS BROUGHT ME HOME AGAIN"

I like this sentence. "The Lord has brought me home again" (Ruth 1:21). Isn't that a great sentence? "The Lord has brought me home, through pain, but I'm home. It was painful, but I'm home again." She says, "I'm home again! I'm where I've always wanted to be, in full obedience, and this is the only place I want to live."

Again, the Lord will orchestrate the easiest and the quickest path home. It doesn't mean it's painless, but it will be the easiest path we can take.

"But He's brought me back empty." Empty of economics, empty of honor, but also empty of pride. She's come back empty again in a good way. She went out with an empty heart and full pockets, but she returned with empty pockets and a full heart. When she went out, her money was full, and her honor was full, but her heart

was empty. She's returned empty in all the other ways, but her heart is now full again. It's so clear through the rest of the book that she's in love with God.

DISCIPLINE IS THE SIGN OF THE FACT THAT WE'RE CHILDREN OF GOD

"The Lord has testified against me." Discipline is the sign of our sonship, the fact that we're children of God. I love this. She's strong in the right way. She's not strong and resistant. She's not strong in blame-shifting; she's strong in her meekness. She has the courage to face the people and to face God. "I've done wrong and I'm under discipline and it's good that I'm here." Amazing!

"She arrived at Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest." We will look at that later.

Amen.