

Ruth 1

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[0 : 00] Okay, continuing in the book of Ruth. As I said, last week we took an overview of the whole book, we read the whole book, which is how the book is used.

Actually, it is read every year around this time at the Feast of Pentecost, Feast of Weeks. And I suggested last week that there's four purposes overall for the book, which are to establish the lineage of King David and ultimately Jesus Christ.

First, it is to show how the Lord always has a faithful remnant, even in the dark times like the time of the judges. Thirdly, it shows how Gentiles are key and they are central to God and to God's plan. And then fourthly, to illustrate for us the concept of redemption and redeemer. And that last one is very key, probably, at least certainly for us, one of the biggest points to illustrate redemption and point us forward to the redemption in Christ.

But that's something that we'll really fully establish, I think, later on, probably in the last chapter, when we see the crescendo, if you like. But I also suggested a couple of application points for the book for us. And the first of those two was that God's in control. God is in control of our hardships.

[1 : 23] He is in control of our steps. And we read that great verse in the forewars about how we do plan, but the Lord directs our steps. And he's even in control of our steps. And he's in control of our steps.

And he's even sovereign over the actions of others. Is Boaz going to redeem? What will the decisions be? And God is able to work all those things, through all those things, to bring about his purposes.

And then the second one, which I didn't really have time to develop fully, was that encouragement for those who are downcast. Because even for one like Ruth, who's just got nothing going for her, nothing to commend her to Boaz as a potential wife.

Actually, she did have everything which was to say she had faith and a faithful heart. And I thought that was awesome. We didn't quite develop it fully because we ran out of time. But I think we will come back to that theme. And actually we'll touch on it a bit today as well.

So having done that full overview today, I want to begin with a verse-by-verse study, which is our usual style here. We usually like to take a book and just go through verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter. And I think it's fair to warn you that we are going to go through chapter one today.

[2 : 36] And it's going to take us about half the time to get through the first five verses. So please don't extrapolate. We've been going for 20 minutes. We're only on verse five. That's because those first five verses are packed.

And we have to really focus on the theology of famine and the journey and why they died. And there's loads to talk about. And after that, it picks up. So please don't panic. We're going to be here until three o'clock.

We won't be here that long, I promise. Right. Without further ado, let's turn to Ruth chapter one and verse one. Father, would you bless this time, bless the reading, and bless the opening of your word. Lord, we confess that apart from our Holy Spirit, we know that your word isn't going to have its full effect on our hearts. Lord, your word has been given, and your spirit has been given.

And you said yourself, Jesus, that he would guide us into all truth. So our prayer this morning is that your spirit would guide us into all truth, help us to understand this wonderful little book.

[3 : 38] Lord, would you speak through me? And I pray that you'd even speak to me as we go through this text. And would you bless all who are here? Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Verse one. Now it came about in the days when the judges governed that there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to reside in the land of Moab with his wife and his two

sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife was Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilian, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah.

So they entered the land of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives.

The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Kilian also died, and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[4 : 44] And the man was left with her two sons. Wow. So a very, very packed introduction to set the stage for the story. And I talked a bit about Bethlehem in Judah last week, which I'm not going to repeat.

It was recorded last week, so if you do want to listen to it, then there's a link. It's just a Google recorder, but just let me know if you haven't got it. We share it on WhatsApp and so forth. And yes, I can share on Signal too, that's fine.

So I won't recap Bethlehem, except to say that it means house of food. Literally, Lechem means bread, but it's most often figuratively used to mean food in general.

Which is why I'm saying, in contrast to most commentators, that it means house of food. That's Bethlehem. And then we saw this gentleman by the name of Elimelech.

His name means, my God is king. Eli, my God. Melech, king. And then Naomi means, my pleasant one. You may know this, but the I on the end there is a Hebrew, yod, and that means it's a possessive, it's mine.

[5 : 52] That's why it means, my pleasant one. So it's a cute little pet name, I think, Elimelech. That's for his wife. My pleasant one. I like it, anyway. And then we have these two sons of theirs.

Machlon, which means weakly, sorry, weakling, or sickly. So, hmm. And then you have Kilion, which similarly means pining away, or wasting away.

So they're not the most, sort of, I don't know, they're not great names to have. You wouldn't really want to be known as Machlon. But as you may know, the names, children were given their names not when they're born, according to, you know, babynames.com or whatever.

They were given, sort of, to commemorate something specific about what happened at the time of their birth, or maybe even in the early infancy. Sometimes they wouldn't name their children for quite some time.

And so it would seem to implicate that they were not healthy. They were unhealthy from infancy. Not well. So that's the family, his wife and his two sons.

[6 : 59] But then we read of this famine in the land. Now you'll recall, well, in fact, we just read it. This is in the days when the judges governed. So when was there a famine in the days of judges?

Well, interestingly enough, I was quite surprised to discover that the word famine doesn't appear in the book of Judges. That's interesting. But there very clearly is times when there is no food.

If you're taking notes, you might jot down Judges chapter 6. That's the time when there was the Midianite oppression. And that was the judge was Gideon.

And if you remember, he was threshing out his grain in the winepress because he was trying to keep the food away from the Midianites who would come in. And then I think he says that they would gobble it all up like locusts.

So the oppression that the Midianites put on Israel very clearly led to a lack of food. I don't know if it was then.

[7 : 57] It could have been another time. But what I would like to draw your attention to is this passage. And you might turn there, actually. It's Deuteronomy 11. Deuteronomy 11 from verse 8 will read.

And this is Moses. So Deuteronomy is Moses speaking just before Israel goes into the promised land. And Moses has something to say about the promised land into which they are entering, which is very, very pertinent to this famine.

Deuteronomy 11, reading from verse 8. Moses says, speaking with God in the first person. You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today so that you may be strong and go in and take possession of the land into which you are about to cross to possess it. And so that you may prolong your days on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them and to their descendants. A land flowing with milk and honey. For the land into which you are

entering to possess it is not like the land of Egypt from which you came.

Where you used to sow your seed and water it by your foot like a vegetable garden. That is to say, manually irrigating, walking around and watering it. It's not like that.

[9 : 14] But the land into which you are about to cross and possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven. A land for which the Lord your God cares.

The eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning even to the end of the year. Wow, special place, huh? And then it shall come about if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul.

That he will provide rain for your land in its season. The early and late rain so that you may gather your grain, your new wine and your oil. He will also provide grass in the field for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied.

Beware that your hearts are not easily deceived and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. Otherwise, the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and he will shut up the sky so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce.

And you will quickly perish from the good land which the Lord is giving you. Wow. I think it doesn't really need a lot of exposition.

[10 : 28] It's pretty straightforward stuff. This is a special place that the Lord particularly cares for. You aren't going to have to go in there and dig and do a whole load of hard graft to get your grain and your crops to grow.

God says, I water this land. I've arranged the topology. It's awesome. You just have to go in and yeah, you've got to plant seeds. Yes, you've got to harvest, but it's not required.

You don't require to work it hard. But if you sin, then I won't look after it. I will not send the rain and there will be a famine. And I think what this is saying is famine doesn't occur by chance in the land of Israel.

Or, if you like, because of the general consequence of the fall, I think that we're saying here, if a famine comes in the land, it is a judgment from God.

This is a judgment from God. There's a famine in the land. It's a judgment from God. So then what should one do? What should Elimelech do? Well, his response is to go down to Moab.

[11 : 36] And I wonder what you think of that as a response. The Moabites are related to Israel, descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew, which I touched on a little last week.

But they are an idolatrous people. And moreover, they are enemies of Israel. Twice in numbers, they are antagonistic.

You've got that whole thing with Belem and Balak. And Moses says in Deuteronomy 23, he says, No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord.

None of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, may ever enter the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam, the son of Beor, from Pethor in Mesopotamia to curse you. Nevertheless, the Lord your God was unwilling to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing. And then, oh, you shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days.

[12 : 51] So, well, there's that. God's heart towards Moab. But then, on the other hand, in Deuteronomy chapter 2, God does expressly forbid the taking of their land.

God says, I've given them that land. And it's there. Actually, should we have a look? Would you mind going to the first slide? I did want to just flash up this.

This is the journey that they will take. And you can see that's Jude and that's Gadgath. And this is the land here that they were expressly told not to take.

The same for Edom as well, which is descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. So, although God says that, they aren't to enter the assembly of the Lord.

They are also under the protection of God in that this is their land. Interesting. And certainly, the animosity between the people of Judah, the people of Israel, and Moab, it continues.

[14 : 00] There is a, you may have heard of a stele called the Misha stele, which was written by a king, King Misha, who was king of Moab.

And on that stele, he's describing a victory. And it seems to parallel 2 Kings chapter 3, the point only being that they did not get on very well. So, why then does Elimelech lead his family?

Well, here's the map of their journey. And then if you just click to the next one, please. I thought this was quite interesting, this next one, because it gives you a bit of a perspective view.

So, we're looking sort of from the northeast here. So, Bethlehem is there. And here's Moab. And you can see how it's sort of elevated up. And they have this, the Armand Rack Valley here.

So, but I think I'm right in saying, that because Bethlehem is several thousand feet up, so I think you can actually see across, which is quite a way, but you would be able to see across.

[15:04] And if things are not looking great in Bethlehem, nothing is growing, and you can look over the other side of the Dead Sea and see sort of lush grain growing on the plateau of Moab, you might think, hmm, it might be worth the trip.

So, they decide to take this journey. It's about 75 miles. Some have got the family going all the way around the town.

That would seem to be quite far. But if you go this way, you've got a long, long tower. I think it's 75 miles on foot, but it's actually 3,700 feet to descend from up here, the whole country, all the way down, so you can see that up here.

And then, you want to go all the way across the land of Reuben, somehow get across the Armand Valley there, and then ascend into Moab, which is 4,500 feet into the Moabite Highlands.

So, this is quite a commitment to make this journey. If you're processing that, Tony, I can see. It is below sea level. I think you're right. Yeah, it is below sea level. Yeah. A couple hundred feet, right?

[16:10] It's even further. So, it's even further. Yeah. It's a long, long way. And, yeah. So, the question that commentaries wrestle with, then, is, should Illimina have led his family there?

And, the law of Moses doesn't actually say, you should never leave the land of Israel. It doesn't actually say that.

So, the rabbis have all kinds of views. And, some of them will say, famine is a valid reason to leave. If there's a famine, then it is valid to leave the land, but only for so long.

And, I don't know how so long it is. It obviously depends on the rabbi. But, ten years? That's quite a long time, ten years. So, what's my view on this?

Should he have gone? Well, here's what we know, right? They go to Moab, and then we see the deaths of Illimina, Machlon, and Kilian. And, I think that their death is evidence that it was opposed by God.

[17:18] And, I think, secondly, it's quite difficult to see how this particular move into Moab can be reconciled to what we read in Deuteronomy 23, where, you know, it was, they are not welcome in the assembly of God.

So, what business would you have going over there? How can you enter the assembly of Moab?

But, I think there's a key point for me, and that is that God does tell his people what to do in a famine.

And, I will admit readily that this is spoken subsequently. This is actually from 2 Chronicles 7. And, this is the heart of God. And, he says this to Solomon, right after Solomon's built the temple.

He says this, 2 Chronicles 7, verse 13 to 16. God says to Solomon, If I shut up the heavens, so that there is no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send a plague among my people, and my people who are called by my name, humble themselves.

I'm sorry, I misread that. And, my people who are called by my name, humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land.

[18:38] Now my eye will be open, and my ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place, the temple. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house, so that my name may be there forever, and my eyes and my heart will be there always.

So, God says, if I shut up the heavens, so that there's no rain, if there is a famine, then if my people will humble and pray, I will hear, and I will heal the land.

And again, I know this was spoken to Solomon, I know this was subsequent, so a bit of an anachronism maybe, but also, we had the tabernacle at this time. The tabernacle was there, actually it was only about 30 miles away, in Shiloh, for Elimelech.

So, I think that his right response should have been to pray to the Lord, to seek God for forgiveness and healing.

I think that, from the text in Deuteronomy, this is a judgment. Elimelech should have seen it as that, and he should have sought the Lord.

[19 : 44] But, they go. And, it would seem that they go alone. It would seem that none of the community in Bethlehem, or Ephrathah, goes with them.

It's just the four of them. Well, and then, and then, they marry Gentiles. And, this is after the death of Elimelech, you may notice.

So, they take wives. Orpah, Orpah, it's a funny name, Orpah comes from a word that means the back of the neck. It means to turn your back.

Either turning back, or turn your back. Interesting name. And then, Ruth has two possible root meanings. One would be friendship, and the other one would be to refresh, or quench.

And, thus, both of those names are quite applicable, because, obviously, we know from reading that Orpah is the one who ultimately will turn her back and walk home, whereas Ruth is the one who remains a friend to Naomi to refresh her.

[20 : 48] So, very, very applicable names. And, again, commentators will speculate, was it right for them to marry non-Jews?

Should they have married non-Jews? The scriptures, well, here's the thing. I think we know enough about our God to know that he created all people, and God isn't racist.

Right? That's not the issue. What God does say in Deuteronomy 7 is this, you shall not intermarry with them, you shall not give your daughters to their sons, speaking of the land of Canaan, that is, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me, and they will serve other gods.

And then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will quickly destroy you. The point is that God wants to, God rather does not want his people who worship him to be wedded to idolaters, people who do not.

And that is a principle that extends right up to this present day. God does not want believers to be yoked to unbelievers or idolaters.

[22 : 00] And it's pretty clear from the text that Ruth is not like that. Ruth is not like that. Ruth is clearly an example of a faith-filled woman. And there is no specific prohibition because God does say don't marry the Canaanites, but they are outside.

So to say you're spending too long on that, no problem. Then what? Then we read of the deaths. So they spent ten years in the land of Moab and then Mahlon and Chilion died.

The author doesn't tell us how or why these three men died. For Elimelech it could be old age. For Mahlon and Chilion it could be that they were sickly, as I said, that they were unwell from birth.

It could be that they just didn't have long. Or it could be anything. It doesn't say it was a judgment. It doesn't say that they had sinned. It could be. It may not be.

The point is the point is this is not the point. The point is what happened to Naomi and how did she become left with just these two daughters-in-law and that's it.

[23 : 11] So the scene is set and the scene is not a particularly pleasant one for my pleasant one. The scene is unpleasant for Naomi and it would be very difficult for me to overstate just how desperate Naomi's situation is.

She's away from home. She has no support and she has no progeny. She has no hope. There's no benefits or allowances in ancient times.

The welfare for anyone had to come from family and if nothing else was available then all that was left was gleaning which is something that we'll see in the next chapter. You had to turn to gleaning. So anyway about halfway verse 6. I told you there was lots there. Alright reading on in Ruth chapter 1 from verse 6 with the scene now set.

So then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the land of Moab because she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited his people by giving them food or lechem food bread.

[24 : 24] So she departed 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. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law go return each of you to your mother's house.

May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you may find a place of rest each one in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them and they raised their voices and wept. However they said to her no but we will return with you to your people. But Naomi said return my daughters why should you go with me?

Do I still have sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? Return my daughters go for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope if I were even to have a husband tonight and also give birth to sons would you therefore wait until they were grown?

Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No my daughters for it is much more bitter for me than for you because the hand of the Lord has come out against me.

[25 : 32] Well as I said the situation in which Naomi finds herself is desperate and so off they set doing those 75 odd miles complete with much descending and ascending in reverse I imagine that when they left Bethlehem they probably came with horse and cart maybe many possessions and then they returned with nothing.

Well I say nothing nothing except two wonderful daughters in law and one in particular who will stay. But it is interesting that as they set off both of the daughters in law do go and it seems that they take for granted that they're going to stay with Naomi.

But what Naomi realises is that for Ruth and Orpah there is family in Moab and they are young enough to remarry. And so she urges them turn back and may the Lord deal kindly with you.

The Lord of course Yahweh the covenant name of the Lord of God and I think it's a remarkable thing that Naomi says this. I think her theology is sufficiently sophisticated that she knows that Yahweh the God of Israel can bless them even in Moab.

Turn back and may the Lord deal kindly with you. A land that Moab of course is the land of the God Chemosh but Naomi realises that Yahweh is the true God.

[27 : 16] And she also says may the Lord deal kindly with you and that word kindly is that wonderful Hebrew word chesed which refers to God's faithfulness and his commitment and his covenant with Israel.

So a very remarkable thing for Naomi to say to these two may the Lord show chesed to you as you have with me. Ruth and Orpah both have been loving faithful committed wives to her sons and she loves them.

But why would they come to Bethlehem? Naomi hasn't really got anything to offer them. You know as she says are you really expecting that I can produce more sons for you?

It doesn't seem to occur to Naomi that they may be able to marry other Jews in the land possibly because of the fact that they are not Jewish possibly because of the fact that they are widows possibly both.

So I think she loves them and wanting the best for them she urges them to stay. Why would you stick with me at such great cost to yourselves?

[28 : 26] Why would you stick with me when you can obtain stability? Why would you waste your life caring for an old dear like me? Naomi? I do wonder, it did make me think about Naomi at this point and how we see Naomi here referring to the name of the Lord three times in her, in what she says to the girls.

May the Lord deal kindly with you, may the Lord grant and then at the end the hand of the Lord has come out against me. And it seems to me that Naomi believes in God, she still knows God, knows that God is good for everyone else but for me, I don't know if that's true.

I don't know if God is good to me. And I know people who are in this category, they believe in God and they believe that God is good but for some reason God hasn't been good to me and bitterness arises.

Don't waste your time telling me about God. I know there's a God, he just doesn't love me, he just doesn't have time for me, he doesn't care for me. God's forsaken me, you should as well.

It's hard. What do you say to someone like that? How do you minister to someone who's hurting like that? And this was something that I pondered for a while and I got a little bit to say at the end on that.

[29 : 57] But that's what, that is Naomi, that's what she says. And I want to read on and we'll see how Ruth responds to this. So from verse 14 now in chapter 1. And they raised their voices and wept again and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her.

Then she said, behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, do not plead with me to leave you or to turn back from following you, for where you go, I will go, and where you sleep, I will sleep.

Your people shall be my people and your God, my God, where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me and worse, for anything but death separates me from you.

And when she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it. Wow. So we see Orpah turn back.

Orpah had said that she would remain. But at the urging of a desperately depressed Naomi, she departed. She did turn.

[31 : 11] She did turn her back and she left. And I think that the author intends for us to see Orpah's turning back as bad wrong.

I mean, I do have a lot of sympathy for Orpah, I have to say. I think it must have been a very, very difficult decision. Very difficult decision. If I stay in Noab, I have family, I have friends, I have security, I have the opportunity to remarry, I can build a life.

It makes a lot of sense to stay here. If I go with Naomi and Ruth, I'm heading to an unknown place with unknown people, there are enemies.

Are they all like Naomi? Probably not. We're enemies for a reason. I have no security, I most likely have no marriage prospects, but that is where Yahweh is worshipped.

The God whom my husband believed in and the God whom Elimelech believed in and the God of Naomi. What do I do? That's a hard gig. We could say, oh well, it's easy, you follow the Lord and you go with the Lord, but in the moment it's hard.

[32 : 17] It's a hard, hard thing. Big decisions are hard, you lose sleep, you consider every angle, what happens, what about this, what do I do? Difficult. And this is the kind of decision that can only be made through prayer correctly.

Anyway, but in the end, Orpah does make a decision. She decides to go, she takes the safe option and I think, again, it is the wrong option. But Ruth is faithful and Ruth has this beautiful seven-fold message from Naomi.

Where you go, I will go. Where you sleep, I will sleep. Your people will be my people, your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die. Where you are buried, I'll be buried.

And then this, may the Lord do so to me and worse, if anything separates me from you. I don't know if that last tone of phrase means much to you.

This is actually Ruth placing upon herself a curse. If she should break her oath. It's language that you see quite often actually.

[33 : 32] I think it's probably about 12 times in the Old Testament that you see, may God do so to me and more also if, it's people saying, I'm putting upon myself a curse if I do not do.

But this is the first time that this turn of phrase comes up, may the Lord, and it's not even may God do so, it's may Yahweh, may the Lord. And I think it's remarkable to hear it coming from the Gentile Ruth.

But she is binding herself to Naomi with an unconditional covenant in the name of the Lord.

That's a big, big thing for her to do. It's an awesome thing for her to do. Well, after we've said this, Naomi, stop speaking to her about it.

I like that. I've got it. Okay, we're done. And I do wonder about this and the validity of binding oneself unconditionally to another human. All humans are fallible and only God is worthy of unconditional commitment for that reason.

[34 : 44] And I think it's fair to say that Elimelech and Naomi have not shown unconditional commitment to the Lord in that they abandoned the land the Lord provided when things got tough.

They took the decision to try and save their lives by entering an idolatrous nation and ironically, their sons died anyway. Elimelech died anyway.

But what you have here in contrast is Ruth, the Moabitess, turning her back on the fertile land of Moab, going into the unknown.

All she knows about it is there was a famine there because she's committed to Naomi and ultimately to the Lord. I think it's an incredible thing. Verse 19. So they both went on until they came to Bethlehem and when they had come to Bethlehem all the city was stirred because of them and the women said is this Naomi?

But she said to them do not call me Naomi call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty.

[35 : 57] Why do you call me Naomi since the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me. So they complete again this 75 mile journey back.

Again I suggest that she went out full. She went out with possessions and maybe carts and animals and livestock and her whole family and then she's come back with nothing except Ruth, a foreigner,

another widow, and the city is stirred.

That word stirred is actually quite a significant Hebrew word. If you look at other usages of that term it would be for things like this great uproar and tumult when Solomon was crowned king and the kind of thing that could be heard from miles away.

This is a big deal. Naomi's return didn't just cause a little bit of gossip around town. There was a what? And you know there was major people were like stunned by it.

There is evidence that Elimelech and Naomi were a significant household in Bethlehem. There was this quaint little rabbinic story that he was a wealthy man, Elimelech, and the people believed that he could supply all their food, such was his wealth, for up to ten years.

[37 : 28] And when the famine came and he knew he couldn't deliver, he hightailed out there. Almost certainly not true. But a quaint little story and I thought I would share it.

I don't know where these rabbinical stories come from, I have to say. But I thought I'd share that one. But he was clearly significant enough for the whole town to be like, what?

Everyone's heard of Naomi. This is Naomi. And this is after ten years. So I think it is fair to infer from that that she was significant. They were significant.

Probably does mean that they were well-to-do and rich. And so, and all is lost. All is lost. Mara, of course, I mean, we can interpret the meaning for the text.

Mara is a word that means bitter, bitterness. And she says, the Lord has testified against me.

[38 : 29] She's, so she's interpreting all of our losses as God's punishment. And it could be that this is her accepting, yeah, we were wrong to leave.

We were wrong to leave. And the Lord has visited that sin on us. Or it could be that it's more like Job, where, if you read Job, he suffers.

He suffers horribly, terribly. But unlike Naomi, what did he do? By all accounts, Job was an upright guy. And he says, what Job says, among his many things, is, make known to me my wrongdoing and my sin.

The Lord has testified against me. Verse 22, so Naomi returns, and with her, Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab, and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

The barley harvest does two things for us. One, it tells us it's around April time, and two, that the famine is certainly over. Otherwise, it's not by harvest time.

[39 : 41] So, this verse concludes the chapter, and it concludes the introductory unit, if you like, to the story. Very much, this last verse, has Naomi as a subject, so Naomi returns, but notice how the focus is very much on Ruth, Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab.

All of that is said about Ruth. She is coming into focus as our key character. Ruth, of course, has never been to Bethlehem, and yet our author says that she's returned from the land of Moab.

And I thought that was quite an interesting thing to say. The word returned has a connotation which is to say that it isn't the case that she's simply emigrated.

It is to say that she has turned to the Lord. It's a word that's often used to mean repentance or turning to the Lord. And I think what the author intends to convey for us is that she has turned from the land of idolatry to the land of the true God.

And the scene that we're set then as we go into chapter 2 next week is, well, I guess there's two problems that they're facing. One is, how are these two widows going to eat?

[41 : 04] Or to put that in another way, well, who's going to provide for their needs? which means it's a land question. How are they going to eat? To eat, you need food, you need fields.

This is a question of land. How are they going to eat? What land are they going to have? The second problem is, what's going to happen to the family lion? Now that there are no more males, two widows, what will happen to the family?

And of course, both of those questions are resolved through redemption, which is a key point of the book. So as we close this morning, I want us to think about application points for this chapter, and I really just have one that I want to talk through, which is, as I alluded to earlier, it's how one ministers to the hurting.

How do you minister to someone who is hurt like Naomi? Someone who has suffered the way that she did and lost so much? in Naomi's misery, she pleaded with her daughters and lord, leave, don't waste your lives looking after me.

Don't sacrifice yourselves for me. And Orpah, as her name suggests, took that advice and she turned her back. And Ruth, as her name suggests, remained faithful into the family.

[42 : 34] I mentioned Job earlier. Job, again, was a man who suffered and his friends failed him in that they had no answers for him. They had nothing to say other than, well, you must have sinned.

Come on, Job, just fess up and you'll be all right. Job 6.14, Job says, for the despairing man, there should be kindness from his friend so that he does not abandon the fear of the almighty.

You need friends. You need kindness from your friends. One who is suffering needs friends and he needs their kindness. She needed the kindness of friends.

Job was despairing, as I said, and his friends were not kind. And they presumed that his suffering was just. Naomi was despairing. And Ruth showed her chesed beautiful.

And so there's a challenge. How do we pastorally minister to those who are hurting? How do we be that friend? Ruth's example was good. I think that we can be quite tempted.

[43 : 41] I know I've been tempted to do this in the past and it's for someone who is suffering and hurting and angry or depressed or whatever it may be, is to say, well, let me give you the reasons and let me try and give you the answers.

Let's reason our way through this. And we could do that, right? We could say, well, look, we've read the story of Ruth. We know what happens in the end. In the end, the Lord blesses Naomi abundantly and we have the redemption that Boaz offers.

We have the birth of Obed to Ruth. We have this daughter-in-law, Ruth, who is better than seven sons and ultimately connected to Jesus Christ, the Saviour, forever.

And so we could say to Naomi, it is only at the end of the story that you can understand the beginning and the middle. And we could say Romans 8, 28.

We know that God calls us all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. We could say that. There's a place for that. But I think that Ruth's example is better.

[44 : 48] Not that we should shrink back from truth, but I think that needs to come later. Ruth's example is, whatever happens, I'm sticking with you.

I'm not going to leave you aside. If you weep, I will weep. I will bear your burdens. We'll see in chapter 2 that Ruth alone goes into the fields to glean. She is laboring for her mother-in-law who is hurting.

And I just think it's a beautiful, beautiful picture as Ruth bears the burden of Naomi. Proverbs 18, 24 says, a person of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Now ultimately the faithful friend that we need in hard times is Christ. It is God, the God who does not condemn us. It is Jesus who has dealt with all of our sins so that we don't need to worry about condemnation.

But I think that there's also a call here for just to weep with those who weep, just to spend time to bear burdens and to ease suffering in any way that we can.

[45 : 59] I want to close with this reading from Habakkuk chapter 3. It might be familiar. Habakkuk chapter 3 verse 17 to 19 says, So yield of the olive fails and the fields produce no food, even if the flocks disappear from the fold, if there are no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in the Lord.

I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength. he has made my feet like deer's feet and has me walk on high places.

That's Habakkuk. And if you ever read those three chapters, wonderful study, you'll see how he starts, the book starts with, why God? Why are you allowing this?

And in the end, that's his testimony. I will accept the Lord, whatever happens. In fact, I won't just accept it. I will worship. I will worship. Amen.

Father, we thank you, Lord, for your word. Lord, we thank you that you are a faithful friend who sticks closer than a brother. We thank you, Lord God, that when we experience hard times, you are that faithful friend.

[47 : 26] Lord, I do pray, Lord, as Ruth gave us an example and is ultimately is found in Jesus Christ, I pray that you would teach us how to minister to our friends and our family who suffer. I pray, Lord God, that you would help us to to minister love and grace and bear one another's burdens.

I pray with you, Lord God, that you provide for us all of our needs. Praise you, Lord God, for the word this morning. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name.
Amen. Alright. Alright. Alright.