

# Returning & Turning God Of Mercy - Ruth 1:6-22

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[ 0 : 00 ] I have forgotten to mention earlier that the DeLon lecture is at 7pm tonight in Cork Baptist Church. I don't know if I mentioned the time. So, verse 1, verse 1.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah.

And they went to Moab and lived there. Now, Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. And she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women.

One named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Malon and Kilion also died. And Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

[ 1 : 19 ] When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud. And they said to her, We will go back with you to your people. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters.

Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters. I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me, even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you wait until they grew up?

[ 2 : 29 ] Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has turned against me.

At this they wept aloud again. Then she kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth clung to her. Look, said Naomi, Your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods.

Go back with her. But Ruth replied, Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go.

And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried.

May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

[ 3 : 34 ] So, the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women explained, Can this be Naomi?

Don't call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. So, Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Father, we thank you for this word. We pray for Gary as he comes to explain it to us and to apply it to our lives.

Please empower him by your spirit to do that effectively now. And Lord, incline our hearts and our ears that we may hear, receive, and put into practice your word.

[ 4 : 45 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.

It's good to be with you again this morning for Ruth, take two. We're in the second in our series. And I wonder if you know what it feels like to be alone, to be lost at sea, to feel that you are devoid of help.

There's nothing that can reach you, nothing that can help you. It's you. You're all alone. Maybe you're at school. Maybe you've been the brunt of the bullying that day and you feel alone. Maybe you've lost a contract at work and you feel that it's your fault and you have that sense of aloneness or isolation. I suppose over the weeks you will find that I have a love for popular music. And so Neil Diamond, he had a thought also about this. And so he wrote this song and he said, L.A.'s fine and the sun shines most of the time and the feeling is lay back.

[ 6 : 10 ] Palm trees grow and the rents are low but you know I keep thinking about making my way back. He says, Well, I'm New York City born and raised but nowadays I'm lost between two shores.

L.A.'s fine but it ain't home. But New York's home but it ain't mine. No more. And he goes on to say that the song I am, I said, if you know the song and I said it to no one there and no one heard at all, not even the chair.

He is alone. He feels alone in this world. And I think right here in this text this is how Naomi feels. It's not clear but in verse 5 where it says Naomi was left without her husband and her two sons.

The actual the Hebrew text doesn't say the word Naomi. It's put in there for our information hopefully by the NIV to identify Naomi but actually it says the woman was left.

It doesn't even name her. She's left. She's there. She's alone. She's left. Can we get into the emotion of that that we have?

[ 7 : 25 ] We're looking at how is God merciful to us in that instance? She's there. She's alone. She's lost literally everything. She's lost her livelihood.

We remember last week that she had you know, women in that culture they needed their meal providers, their meal protectors and in that culture without a man she was destitute.

She was facing poverty. She was facing a life of hardship. Okay.

Ah, there we go. And so we can think of two questions. Had a little fight with the controller there.

Must have hit the wrong button. So where do we turn to when we've got nowhere else to go?

When trouble comes into your life what's your first port of call? Where do you go? Where do you turn to when you're in that state? When you need a helping hand?

[ 8 : 33 ] Where do you go to? And so we find that here in the first couple of verses in verses 6 to 7. Let's look at them together. And we look at Naomi's empty return.

And she's leaving, she's decided to leave this place of judgment. It's a place that's, you know, as we read in the text, she's saying that she feels that God is against her.

Somehow she is attributing her current state of losing her sons as an act of God. And where is she? Why should she feel that way?

Remember that she's in Moab. And we have to remember what is Moab? What does Moab mean in this story? Well, Moab obviously is the place of God's enemies.

It's where God's enemies reside. They worship false gods. They sacrifice their children to idols. In history with Israel they have, you know, they are the result of an incestuous event between Lot and his daughter.

[ 9 : 41 ] They're the offspring of Lot and his daughter. We read in Numbers 22 that the king of Moab actually tried to get the prophet Balaam to curse Israel.

So there is no love lost between these two groups of people. And in Numbers 25 actually the ladies of Moab have brought the men of Israel into sexual sin and they started worshipping idols rather than God.

And in this time period here and in Judges 3 12-14 the Moabites have inflicted 18 years of pain and punishment on the Jewish people in Israel.

So of all the places that Elimelech decided to take his family and to take Naomi Moab seems a very strange location. It seems a very strange place to have gone.

And what did she leave? She had left the people of God. She had left the promises of God. She had left the covenant of God. She had left the worship of the true and living God and she had left God's promises.

[ 10 : 48 ] And so she decides through this event that she's now going to leave this place. This place that has in the beginning had such promise. She left a famine in Bethlehem.

She went to Moab seeking food and all that she's got is death and disaster. And that's where we left Naomi last week. And so she's decided to turn to the place of mercy.

And there are three ladies involved. There is Naomi and Orpah and Ruth the daughters-in-law and they've decided to leave the place of Moab and they're setting out on a road.

They're setting out on a journey and they're turning towards a new home. For Naomi it's returning home but for these two young Moabite ladies they're facing an uncertain future.

They're three widows. They're alone. They have no male protector and they're going to make a journey on their own which is dangerous in itself and they're heading back to a place of mercy.

[ 11 : 58 ] And why is it a place of mercy? Well we learn that from the text. It's because God has had mercy on his people. It says when Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people the word there means visited.

He's come around them. It also can be used in a negative term that the Lord has come to visit his people in judgment or chastisement but here it's quite clear that whether or not Israel has repented God has shown grace to them and he has come and visited to them and that he has brought food. He's brought bread again to Bethlehem. And as we were looking in home groups on Wednesday the word Bethlehem literally means house of bread and God was stocking up if you like the house he was refilling the house of bread.

And so God had visited his people and the thought from Naomi is well if God has blessed them maybe I can go back there maybe God can bless me maybe I might be able to have some of that bread.

In the law it says that the children of Israel are to look after their widows so maybe I can leave Moab I can return home and I will find grace and mercy at home.

[ 13 : 21 ] But she's empty she has nothing she went away full and she's now heading back. And so they head off on the road and we have what I'm calling a crisis of faith.

You know we all start off on a journey and we all think yeah we're going to climb that mountain we're going to start off with a couch to 5k and we're going to make that distance we all start off with good intentions and then somewhere about week three we realise what we've committed ourselves to we realise you know I have to come back here three times a week you know for the next and we suddenly count the cost of what it is that we've agreed to do whether it's running around a park climbing a mountain in this case it's making a journey and moving an immigration from one place to another and so we have a misplaced faith I think it's interesting that we have a person after such loss she still has faith in her God she still has faith in the God of Israel Naomi setting out on that trip she has faith but what happens suddenly as they're walking along

Naomi decides do you know what I've asked of these two girls I've asked too much I've asked too much from these two girls you know maybe God could bless them in Moab maybe that's best she decides that those two girls coming with her to Israel is just too much to ask and so that ensues this conversation that we're going to look at here the majority of this morning this conversation between Orpah Ruth and Naomi and so we look at that and we find that here and then in verse 8 then Naomi said to your two daughters-in-law go back each of you to your mother's home may the Lord show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me so she's got a very logical response she's saying thank you very much but I'm I'm setting you free you don't have to show any loyalty to me I want you to go back to your mother's home

I want you to be free to marry again I want you free to have a life and in that she's showing us a glimpse of her own heart and her own grief she's saying there's no don't come with me there's only heartache there's only heartbreak there's no future with me and so she's urging them to go back and they have a response and she says in verse 10 we look and said to her we will go back with you and your people it's a good response the ladies have resolve and they say no Naomi we're we're not going to go back we're going to go with you and your people but in some ways in this response they've only gone so far and later we'll see that Ruth wants to go just that little bit further they're encouraged they say no Naomi we're not going to leave you we know it's tough but we're going to hang in there and you know sometimes we also look for what I'm going to call looking for the DIY solution you know the do it yourself it's the cheaper option shall I get someone to paint my house no

I'm going to go to B&Q; and I'm going to buy the paint and I'm going to do it myself and so Naomi is looking at herself and she's thinking how can I solve this problem what am I going to do and so she has another logical argument and she says return home my daughters I'm too old to have another

husband and even if I thought that there was still hope for me even if I had a husband tonight and then give birth to sons would you wait until they grew up and so she's using all of her argumentative skills all of her logic and she's saying look there's nothing here for you I cannot help you at this point we need to understand a little bit about the custom and the custom of marriage if you were married and you had a brother and he was not married and you died and your wife and you had had no children well then the custom was in

[ 18 : 16 ] Deuteronomy 25 510 the custom was then that your brother would marry your wife he would marry the widow and then the first child from that marriage then would be considered the child of the dead brother and so that his name and his inheritance would continue and so this is what's going on in the background of her her mind she's saying even if I got a man tonight and even if we manage to conceive tonight it's going to be another 18 years until there's a son who's able to marry you are you pair going to hang around that long are you going to do without a husband for the next 16 18 years and even then what age will you be are you going to be past child bearing by the time there's an old enough son she's saying naturally speaking this is a hopeless situation hopeless and this highlights

Naomi's loss even further it highlights that she's saying look look girls it's over for me I've lost my inheritance I've lost my family I've lost my name I've lost everything please go back so what happens well as we see in the text we read on it says return home my daughters I am too old to have another husband and even if I thought there was still hope for me even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons would you wait until they grew up would you remain unmarried for them no my daughters it is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has turned against me and at this they wept again then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and so Orpah I can't be too hard on her she's going back she's bought the argument she says you know what Naomi I think you're right I'm going to be an obedient daughter-in-law and I'm going to do what you ask I'm going to go back to my mother's house and I'm going to trust hopefully that God will bless me in Moab and so she kisses her mom in-law for the last time and she sets off back down the dusty road alone heading towards Moab and this and this isn't without emotion we can read that there's loud wailing there's crying there's kissing embracing this is an emotional mess I've seen those you know goodbyes and coming home my son he was in America for for four weeks and you know when kids are there teenagers are four weeks on the day that they had to come home from America and they lived there you know for four whole weeks they were in tears you know they had a day of you know how to cope with going home you know it's like come on guys and four weeks and they were in tears the girls were in tears the girls that had found new boys and the boys that had found new girls transatlantic relationships via you know text message and they were all broken hearted and in tears but this is way worse this is a decade of life together this is going through grief this is this is them sharing in the bereavement throwing the the soil on the coffin of their loved ones and so this isn't a light decision that Orpah makes but she makes it nonetheless and she decides to go back but with this narrative is wonderful is wonderful because of this lady Ruth Ruth's response is startling on any any kind of scale despite knowing that the future ahead is bleak despite knowing that it doesn't look good her response is outstanding let's read together what she says it says but Ruth but Ruth clung to her look said Naomi your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods go back with her but Ruth replied this is this is amazing she said don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you where you go

I will go where you stay I will stay your people will be my people and your God my God where you die I will die and there I will be buried and may the Lord deal with me be it ever so severely if even death separates you and me wow she says I don't care I'm going with you Naomi but more than that I'm going with you and there's nothing that's going to stop me not even death from being with you and being your daughter-in-law I'm going to be there and even when you die even when you're buried I'm going to stay in your land with your people and your God and I'm going to die there also no matter what the cost wow I don't know about you but when I read this it's charged with emotion it's charged with just the amazing prospect that she knows she's a Moabite but there are a few questions that I have a few questions that I would like to have answered she's clinging to Naomi but what did she know about

[ 24 : 38 ] God what did she know about the God of Israel what had she learned in the ten years of being with Naomi about the God of Israel what did she learn that made her so determined to stay and you can't say that she had witnessed great blessing you can't say that she had witnessed you

know an abundance of a joy filled life she had witnessed Naomi through pain and through suffering 1 Peter 3 15 it tells us to always be ready to give an account for the hope that we have and I think this situation here it says something to us that God can speak to people God can speak to people out of our pain God can speak to people out of our bad situation because despite the bleak situation Ruth wanted to choose Yahweh the God of Israel over the Moabite gods what had she learned that child sacrifice the God of Israel doesn't like that

I like that about this Yahweh this God of Israel Yahweh being one of the Old Testament names for God the covenant name of God what had she learned that she decided that this God it's better than my family it's better than everything that's familiar to me it's better than my security it's better than my possibility of gaining a new husband it's better than it's better than that was what was running through Ruth's mind she didn't want to let Naomi go because she didn't want to let Naomi's God go and so in that Ruth reaches towards the mercy of God she says no matter how bad it's going to be in Israel I think it's going to be better for me there than it is going back to Moab and she reaches and she clings to Naomi and she clings to mercy Ruth replied don't urge me to go back I want your God to be my God and I wonder this morning in this conversion because that's what she was doing here she was converting she was saying I don't want to be a Moabite I want to be an Israelite I wonder if you could say that this morning maybe you call yourself a Christian maybe you don't know what a Christian is maybe this is your first time in the church but really as Christians we should be able to say this we should be able to say to Jesus I'm committed to you through thick and thin where you go I will go what you do I will do whom you love I will love I am with you not only in death but through death could we say that this morning about our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that no matter where you go Lord no matter where you take me no matter what you do no matter who you love

I'm all in I'm all the way till death do us part and so they're going to return return and they're going to return back then to Bethlehem and so the story closes then in this chapter with a return they're returning to mercy they're returning to the promised land and so what happens on the return well if you live in a small town you know that gossip travels faster than air it travels faster you know than the speed of light I was chatting to Ross and he was saying you know there are not too many northerners down in Cork you know you don't see too many number plates so maybe that means you know my red car driving around here people are you know they notice and if they don't notice your car when you open your mouth you know when you go into the supermarket they say you're not from around here you're different and so the prospect of that is in

Ruth she's going to face all of that but so is Naomi and so the buzz and the gossip of the small town it's there it's and they ask the question the ladies are saying is this Naomi let's read it together so the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem and when they have arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was stirred there was a noise there was a buzz and because of them and the woman exclaimed can this be Naomi is it her is it really her she left over a decade ago it looks like her oh boy but the years haven't been good to her she went away she was you know she was the wife of Elimelech she had two little boys but here she is she's alone and she has who's that who's that Moabite who's that girl that's with her maybe somebody should go and ask her and she overhears this or someone builds up the courage and they say you know can this be

[ 30 : 09 ] Naomi and she said don't call me Naomi you see what's in a name my name is Gary James Richmond I was named by my father my dad is Henry John Richmond and for many years I cried and I said why didn't you call me John Henry because my brother's called John Henry and I'm not called after you and I cried because I had a different name for my dad and my brother that's what children do we're idiots and my dad would remind me of this she used to cry why didn't you not call me and you know and but Naomi she's rejecting all of that she's saying God is against me so much that I want a change of name call me Mara which means bitter because her name Naomi it means sweet what's in a name she's saying

I don't have that identity anymore I'm not that person anymore see in the beginning in chapter one we started off with a flurry of names we started off with Limelech Malon Kilion you know what does name mean you know if you have a new baby and you name it it's all the promise all the promise of life all the promise of what lies before them all the promise of what lies in the future but here Naomi she's taking on a new name and she's saying I've lost everything all I am is bitter it's disappointment she's believing that God is against her and she she owns up she fesses up to your own mistakes and she owns up in that she has this statement in Ruth 121 where she says I went away full it was

my decision to go to Moab whether she was coerced by her husband whatever the reason was that took her to Moab she owns it and she said no it was me

I went but the Lord in his dealings with me he's brought me back he's brought me back here and I've come back empty just call me bitter and that's where we leave Naomi today she owned her bad choices but she's missing out what can she not see well she can't see that she has Ruth she can't see the promise she can't see the future she can't see the mercy of God and that Ruth has come back with her she can't even see the possibility of what God might do through Ruth and that's for next week so if you're really encouraged please come back but the mercy of God is there in that Ruth has come with her Ruth has claimed her God but here she's still known as Ruth the Moabite she still has that stigma of coming from another place and so all that Naomi's fears has come true she's not being necessarily accepted by the people she's there but she's there as the outsider she's there as the foreigner she's there as that lady the

Moabite that has come with Naomi Ruth the Moabite we read that in the text don't call me Naomi she told him call me Mara because the almighty has made my life very bitter I went away full but the lord has brought me back empty why call me Naomi the lord has afflicted me the almighty has brought misfortune upon me and so Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite her daughter in law and they're arriving in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning you see we have a harvest of mercy God's timing is perfect God could have brought them back at any time but he's brought them back at harvest time if he had brought them back after the harvest all the food would have been collected and there was no prospect of them sharing in the harvest but God has brought them back at their right time to share in the harvest if you were at home grip you would have read this

I stole this from my notes so I'm going to read it out Bethlehem the house of bread was being full of bread but this morning we haven't come here this morning to think about Bethlehem in itself we've come here to think about the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus exclaimed in John 6:35 he said I am the bread of life and Jesus is greater than a town full of food Jesus is the very source of all life and the creator of all things through his death we can share in that life together with us with him for all eternity you see lacking food is serious and hunger and famine well they destroy many lives but how more devastating it is if you don't know Christ to not know Christ is far worse than not having any bread how terrible it is to be hungry and not know where to find bread if you know Christ this morning you know where to find bread we have the bread of life if you don't know

[ 35 : 43 ] Christ this morning I can tell you where to fill your hunger and your hunger won't be filled in the philosophies of the world it won't be filled on television it won't be filled by the lottery it won't be filled by Tesco because all of those things of this world are only a temporary filling but Christ can fill you for all eternity Christ has bread that lasts forever he is the bread of life so I'd like to leave you with an invitation to come to come to Christ come to the bread of life I'll just read them out for you the powerpoint seems to not like me anymore Matthew 11:28 says come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light

Jesus says come Jesus was calling back Naomi and Ruth he was bringing them back to Bethlehem he was saying come it's harvest time there's food in Bethlehem Jesus is beckoning you to come last week we thought about the prodigal son who had stayed in the far off country and then he decided that he would return home and so if that's you you're living in the far off country or you're living in Moab the blessing and the mercy of God is saying to you this morning to come home come home because Christ has paid a costly price so that you can do that he died on the cross he took away our sin he took our punishment so that we can come home so that we could partake of the bread of life amen let us pray together father god we thank you for the lives of

Naomi and Ruth lord we thank you for Ruth's statement in the center of this chapter the turning point lord we thank you that she said no I'm not going back to Moab I'm going to Bethlehem and I want you to be my god I want your people to be my people and lord this morning if there's someone here and they haven't said that lord I pray that now as we pray together that they would say I want you to be my god I want the lord Jesus Christ to come into my life lord if there's a prodigal here this morning or lord we're just feeling far away from you lord that we would again turn from our sin that we would set our face towards you and that we would come home lord be with us the rest of the day lord would you bless the lecture this evening and lord would you be with us as we go out into to carry a line and lord would you help us to share Christ with others the bread of life in Jesus name

amen so and the talk and and all and those