

# Ruth and Loss

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Preacher: John deBorde

[ 0 : 00 ] So we're starting a new series, and this is Ruth and Loss. And Andy was telling me just before the service started that he had met the author, Ian Coffey, at Spring Harvest in France, where he led a week, and he was very impressed with him, and that's why he recommended the book.

So it comes with high recommendations. So could this story be actually what's happening now? Some 4,000 years later, Naomi, husband and two sons, refugees in Moab due to a famine in Israel. Now, the experts don't actually know why there was a famine in Israel. It could have been drought. It could have been terrorist activities wiping out the crops, or it could have been a bit of both. But there they are. They left Bethlehem and went into Moab. And do you know where Moab is? Well, I can tell you because I looked it up.

It's to the east of the Dead Sea and was the country that some of Lot's children developed. And you may remember that Abraham gave Lot the choice of lands when they separated after an argument, and Lot chose the fertile lands of Jordan.

[ 1 : 31 ] So the sons marry local girls, not Jewish girls. Husband dies. Sons dies. No children.

Grandchildren. So, say, it could be just like what's happening today. And after about 10 years, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem as famine over and wants to leave her daughter's-in-law in Moab.

But one stays and Ruth goes with Naomi. Naomi feels at total loss, and the women of Bethlehem said, Is this Naomi?

In these words, there was an expression of amazement, not so much at the fact that Naomi was still alive and had come back again, as at her returning in so mournful a condition as a solitary widow without either husbands, sons or grandsons.

And that's why she replied, Call me not Naomi, which means gracious, but Mara, which means the one who has experienced bitterness.

[ 2 : 46 ] And as an aside, there is no mention there of how Ruth feels. And I expect she felt very isolated. So, let's leave Ruth and Naomi having just returned to Bethlehem and in a desperate state for a few minutes, whilst I tell you a story of Charity, who lives in Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world.

And this is in her own words, as posted on Facebook. I enrolled at African Bible College for my first year in 2010.

Three years later, I dropped out because I had not been able to pay school fees in time. Three minutes later, I got pregnant out of wedlock.

I went through a lot the next three years that followed. I hit rock bottom and I hit it hard. I was homeless most of the time, broke to the bone, no relationship with Christ because I hated him for letting my life suck.

I was in a physically abusive relationship before I became a single mother. I had no hope. Many told me my future was ruined and that no man would want to marry me because I had a child now.

[ 4 : 14 ] I was called a disgrace, loose, and other weird names. I lost weight. I went through suicide attempts.

Depression was my friend and I was just lost. But God, he had different plans. He surrounded me with amazing people who shared my pain, who supported me, who gave everything they could to get me out of the dark, dark place I had found myself.

They allowed God to use their time, their money, and homes to help me. I got better, kept a job for more than a year, and found hope in Christ again.

In August 2016, I went back to finish my schooling. June 3, 2017, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in mass communications.

I don't know about you, but the God I serve does everything in perfect timing. Ladies and gentlemen, I am not a college dropout.

[ 5 : 33 ] I am a graduate. And I have an update because my son and daughter-in-law and their children live in Malawi, and they're over here at the moment.

And they were one of those who supported charity and are continuing to do so. And she's working now, selling T-shirts, but she wants to do something different.

She has plans to set up a retreat to support women in abusive relationships and is trying to get funding. I'm now going to put some pictures on the screen of her graduation.

And perhaps you could remember charity in your prayers. And there she is with my son and daughter-in-law, smiling.

And the next picture. And there she is with her family, and you see her little daughter down at the bottom. And the next picture.

[ 6 : 40 ] And there's the daughter, who I understand is a bit of a handful. And the final picture. And there she is again with her family, looking very happy.

So, say, perhaps you could remember her in your prayers. So, returning to Naomi and Ruth, the story continues.

And Ruth marries Boaz, a relative of Naomi, and she has a son. And he was called Obed. I digress again.

While life for Naomi improved, having a grandson and a roof over her head, and charity is looking forward with hope to be able to do God's will in her life, there are others who have tragedy, who have tragedies, who can't see a future.

The news is full of such people as the Greenhall Tower block fire, terrorist killing, those caught up in war, and people in day-to-day lives who have suffered individual tragedies, which they find hard to overcome.

[ 7 : 57 ] And I ask the question, what can we do? What can we offer them? I think there are three things. We can offer them love. We can offer them our prayers and our support.

And I make no apology for reading again what Archbishop John Sentineau said on Prayer for the Day on Radio 4, just after the tragedy in Manchester.

And he said, until earlier this week, I had not heard of Ariane Grand, and I must admit I hadn't either. But I suspect it's a bit more like in my days and perhaps some of your days, when the Beatles first hit the scene, there was a lot of enthusiasm for them.

And so that's what my thing. And he didn't know that she was so popular with children, but I do know now, and that her fans call her the Arianeater.

Her fans went joyfully and expectantly with their parents to see her in concert in Manchester Arena. And soon after the bombing, she responded by saying, broken from the bottom of my heart, I am so sorry.

[ 9 : 21 ] I don't have words. Yesterday, she announced she will hold a benefit concert for the victims and their families. Our world is in pain, groaning and longing to be liberated from futility and hatred.

The deliberate targeting of innocent children, adults and their families with a calculated and callous equation of evil demonstrated that hatred.

A deliberate act contorted and twisted within the framework of a brutalistic ideology that exists outside the understanding of shared humanity.

My hearts and prayers go out to the family and friends of all those who were murdered and injured. One of the fundamental laws of physics reminds us that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

It's a law that such jihadists, the purveyors of these heinous criminal acts across cities and continents, fail to understand. Within minutes of the bombing in Manchester and the attack in London, that law was demonstrated by the emergency services and countless acts of love and kindness by many.

[ 10 : 51 ] I experienced it myself at the vigil in Albert Square. The opposite reaction to the actions of these evil men a lone bomber, a coming together of love.

The love that we have witnessed stands in dark opposition to the evil that sought to taunt it. It's a love that is heard, often heard, and read at weddings and funerals, that great hymn of love from 1 Corinthians 13.

The love which contends with tragedy, endures hardship, is steadfast in difficulty, and in the end wins out.

That strong and long-lasting love that carries people through both good times and bad, the love that many waters cannot quench or blow apart.

The pain, grief, righteous anger, and the consequences of these evil acts will endure for years in the lives of those who have lost loved ones.

[ 12 : 03 ] But the hatred that inspired that criminal act will lose. It will not have the final word. And as Martin Luther King Jr.

once remarked, darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that.

And in the opening verses of John's Gospel, in him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And so, I contend it's our responsibility as members of the Church to support those in need, those who have lost hope and can't see a future.

It will not be easy. And to come back to Ruth, if you look at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, it says, a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

[ 13 : 15 ] Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob. It goes on, then it says, Salmon, the father of Boaz, Boaz, the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Obed, the father of Jesse, and Jesse, the father of King David, and David, the father of Solomon. And the genealogy finishes with Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and who was born, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

So God does work in mysterious ways. Finally, just a little extract from this book of her story. It's called Jill's Story, and I think you will recognize where it comes from.

Jill Fairway saw two of her children die from a rare metabolic disease. The disease doesn't show until the children are about three, and by that time, their first child, Katie, was diagnosed.

[ 14 : 29 ] They already had their second child, Tom, who also had the syndrome. Katie died aged 11. Tom survived until he was 15.

Jill and her husband, Eddie, nursed their children to the end, and out of their personal pain of loss, something beautiful was born. I met with Jill when she invited me to speak at a special service for the organization that she and Eddie had founded, the Southwest Children's Hospice.

We met to plan the event, and Jill told me her story of loss. At one really dark time in their journey, with two terminally ill children, she had woken Eddie in the middle of the night and exclaimed, we are going to take all this pain and do something good with it, and they did.

Today, there are three children's hospices serving in the Southwest of England. In 1995, Little Bridge House was first to open in Barnstable, Devon.

This was followed by Charlton Farm near Bristol in 2007, and Little Harbour in St. Austal, which opened in 2011. Millions of pounds were raised by a couple who didn't like public speaking, and scores of families have been helped as their dying children have received love and care in their last months on earth.

[ 16 : 11 ] Taking pain and doing something good with it, it sounds like a good way to deal with loss.

So, perhaps I can leave you with that thought, and the thought that out of Naomi's and Ruth's tragedies came a great genealogy, that from that came King David, and it followed up to Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.