

Complaining About God

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move in a very powerful way in the center of each of our hearts. Father, you know what's going on. Father, some of us might be just really doing spectacular and we praise you for it.

Some of us, Father, might be really struggling. Some of us, Father, might no longer struggle, but we become very cynical. And Father, we always know that we have a hard time reading our hearts truly and just even being honest with ourselves, honest with each other and honest with you.

So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit help us to be honest about the state of our lives and the state of our hearts. And as your Holy Spirit leads us to a sense of honesty about ourselves, may your Holy Spirit lead us to Jesus, lead us to what he's done for us on the cross, and help us to hear your word, Father, in light of these two realities.

And may your word be written on our hearts. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. So we're going to be going through the book of Ruth.

You can sort of open that if you want. It's a hard book to find in the Bible because it's very, very short. But here's the thing about what we're going to sort of look at in Ruth and all, is there's a big gap for a lot of us between what our hopes are and what our expectations are, what our desires are, and what reality is like.

[1 : 2 5] Like for a lot of us, I guess I should be looking at it from your point of view, our expectations, our hopes are like this. And for a lot of us, our reality is way underneath the hopes and expectations we have.

And for a lot of us, you know, we sort of have this expectation that life's going to be like this, but the reality is like this. We thought by now we'd be married. We thought by now we'd have kids.

We thought by now we'd have more than one kid or we'd have lots of kids. We thought by now we'd be a lot better off. We thought by now we'd know more about Jesus. We thought by now we'd have a lot more peace in our lives.

We thought by now we'd have more friends. We thought by now we'd be living somewhere nicer than where we're living. And sometimes it's just a bit of a small type of thing, but for many of us it can be actually quite crushing.

Because, and it's not even that our desires and our hopes were sinful. I don't know that, you know, by now we hoped, I don't know, we'd be the head of a drug cartel or something, and now we're disappointed that we're not.

[2 : 3 0] I mean, you know, if that was your hope, God will always crush that hope, okay? If not before the grave, then after, because it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But anyway, that's going to get us on a rabbit trail. But, you know, for a lot of us it's just we have really good hopes, that, you know, that we'd be making a bit more money, or that we'd have job security, or that we have a job, you know?

And so we hope for this. We expect this. And this is especially hard. If you're a guest here this morning, and you're still trying to figure out this Jesus thing, it's a very hard thing for a lot of Christians, you know?

Because for Christians we sort of have this expectation that we should just be better, like a better Christian, like better dealing with our sin, you know?

Better just dealing with problems. And the reality is it's way below that. And for a lot of us what that does is it creates a type of bitterness.

[3 : 3 0] It creates cynicism. For many of us we feel trapped, especially for Christians, but not just for non-Christians. We feel trapped. We don't know what to do with it. And so the scripture text that we're looking at today is a very powerful story about expectations and hope like this, reality right like

that, and what it's like to be in between expectations that are high, reality like this, and what does it look like in terms of a relationship with God.

So that's what the text is going to talk about. So it would be a great help to me if you open your Bible. We're going to actually have the text up there because we're going to read through the story of Ruth, chapter 1.

But even though the Bible text will be up there, if not this week, other weeks, it's just really helpful to bring your own Bibles because as you'll see there's some very powerful verses that can be very helpful for many people, just sort of make a bit of a note beside that in their Bible so they can find it later.

But the text will be up there because I want you to be able to see and not only hear as I read, but see the text as well. So just so you know, as we're about to begin this text, in terms of a bit of a, of, you know, placing it somewhere, the Book of Ruth is, if you have Netflix or if you're a fan of British TV, there's one story in four episodes.

So you can go home and binge all four episodes later on. We're just going to look at one episode. We're looking at one story, one episode that all together, there's going to be four of them and you need to watch and know all four of them before you fully get all of the things that there are in the story.

[5 : 09] We're just looking at one episode today and it's chapter 1. And here's how it goes. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land and a man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

So just sort of pause here because for a lot of you in the room, I've already lost you. Judges, Moab, yada, yada, yada, yada, yada.

Okay, so just to put it in a little bit of a place, what we now know of as the Bible was actually written over many, many, many, many centuries. In fact, over a millennium in different times and with different authors.

And what this story is, it's part of a... The story that we're going to read, what the author has just told us is that, first of all, there's a Hebrew technical thing, but he's telling us it's a true story.

I just have to take my word for it. In the original language, there's a technical thing that he begins by saying, I'm going to tell you a true story. And he sets it about 1,100 years B.C.

[6 : 15] I know, that's a long time. That's Iron Age I. Okay, so wheels have been invented. But, you know, and writing's been invented. But 1,100 B.C., it's the time of the judges.

And in the flow of how the Bible develops, sort of there's an overarching story. And what there is is, you come up to the time of Abraham, and then there's promises that God's going to make a nation out of them, et cetera, et cetera.

The tribes of Israel, Israel starts to grow as a nation. They're in Egypt, trapped in bondage and slavery. And there's a man by the name of Moses who leads the people of Israel out of slavery. But he doesn't actually lead them into the promised land. That's another story. But a man by the name of Joshua leads them into the promised land. And after Joshua dies, is the time of the judges. And the time of the judges is from the time of Joshua's death until Israel gets its first king. And the time of the judges, what we would now call it, it's a failed state.

[7 : 19] Okay? Like when people talk about Libya today, it's a failed state. What characterizes Libya? Lots of warlords. And that's what characterizes Israel. Very shortly after Joshua dies, Israel in effect becomes a failed state.

There's lots of chieftains, tribal warlords, armed to the teeth. And it's a very, very, very dark time in Israel's history. And if you read the book of Judges, what happens is periodically God tries to pierce the darkness by raising up a particular warlord to try to bring a bit of harmony and type of peace and prosperity.

But generally, the time of the judges is a failed state. So that's what the author is telling you. I'm going to tell you a story that happens during a time when Israel is a failed state, ruled by many, many different chieftains all fighting each other.

Okay? Oh, the other thing I'll mention to you this. It's going to be really important to the story. So the Israelites have stories to understand how the different nations come about. And Moab is an historic enemy of Israel.

And their understanding of how Moab came to be was that there was a man named Lot. He got... I'm not making this up. This is actually in the Bible. It's in the book of Genesis. A man named Lot got

drunk and had sex with his daughter.

[8 : 32] And as a result of having sex with his daughter after he was drunk, the child that was born became the founder of the people of Moab. And the people of Moab become a traditional enemy of Israel, even though Israel is a failed state.

Another thing about Moab is the gods that they worship include the god Moloch, which is a god that demands infant sacrifice.

And it would have been... Many of the gods in Moab would have required that the way you go to worship... Like, you know, you've heard this before. If I was an ancient Moabitess and I said to Louise, I'm off to the temple to worship, it would mean I'm having sex with a temple prostitute. That's how you worship. And so that's the situation of this. So all the way through when you hear Moab, that's the context. This is a woman who's grown up worshipping Moloch, these fertility religions, ancient enemy of the Israelite people.

And so now you have a bit of a context. I'll go back and... So anyway, so I'll go back and read it again. Maybe it won't be quite as yada yada now that you hear it. Okay, so in the days... Verse 1, in the days when the judges ruled to fail state, there was a famine in the land and the man of Bethlehem...

[9 : 52] And here, by the way, there's a great irony because all Jewish people reading this would know what Bethlehem means. Bethlehem means house of bread. And in the house of bread, there's a famine. So a man of Bethlehem, the house of bread, he leaves to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife, Naomi, and the name of his two sons were Malon and Kilian. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah and they went into the country of Moab and remained there.

And just sort of paused there because there's something else which is significant. I'm called George because my dad's name is George. And my sister and my brother, they aren't named after any relative.

They're just... My parents like the sound of their names. But in this culture, names always mean something. And it's a bit of a... It's a big statement. And in the original language, this guy, Elimelech, and his wife, Naomi, they named their two sons, I am not making this up, weak and fragile. Wouldn't that suck? Hi, I'm weak. This is my brother, fragile. And so for the Jewish readers, it's entering into the fact that what's going on here?

[11 : 17] This guy's named his kids weak and fragile. And sojourn means that they go to be a resident alien for a season in Moab. They leave the promised land to go into a place of Israel's enemies.

But as the language moves, you see that they begin just by going to be their resident aliens, like just to be migrant workers for a short season, but they end up staying. They end up making it their home.

Verse 3. But Elimelech, by the way, which means my God is king, the husband of Naomi died. Remember I said this is a difference between and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives. The name of one was Orpah and the name of the other was Ruth. And they lived there about 10 years. And both Malan and Killian died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Now here's her expectations, Naomi's expectations and hopes were probably to have a lot more than two children. to spend a long life with her husband and to just sort of weather the famine and be able to return to where she knew everybody and everybody knew her name in a good sense.

[12 : 36] And now here she is. She's more than 10 years living in a country that worships other gods and practices child sacrifice and fertility religion. Her boys have married Moabite women, which maybe isn't that bad from her point of view.

Maybe it's all right. The text doesn't tell you whether she thinks it's good or bad. And then 10 years, at least 10 years later, both of her sons die and they have never had children. And in the ancient world, this is just disaster upon disaster upon disaster.

Her hopes and expectations are here. The reality, well, I'd have to get off the stage and get down on the ground because that's how low the reality is. She's been crushed by life and she's now probably in her mid-50s, which is really old in the ancient world.

And her life has not even remotely turned out the way that it should. Now, I just want to make a bit of a pause here about the story before we keep on reading it.

To modern people reading this story, there's some stuff in it that sounds really crazy and sexist, right? Like, if Disney was doing this story today, well, he'd pray love.

[13 : 49] Your husbands die, you'll pick up some Buddhism and drink some wine and do a bit of traveling and pick up a lover, begin a new life. You know?

But gosh, the idea that just because your man is no longer in your life, your life is over, like, how crazy is that? Well, so why is it that we would even be looking at a story where the great tragedy is for a woman to no longer be connected to a man?

Like, what on earth could a story like this, which is written 1,100 years before Jesus, that has such a patriarchal and sexist context and culture, why on earth would any smart person even bother reading such a story?

Well, there's a couple of reasons. the first reason, if you're here as a guest, is that Jesus tells me to read it. As crazy as it sounds, if you go back and you read the book of Luke and you see what Jesus says after he's died and after he's risen from the dead, Jesus says that everything in those 39 books that we now call the Old Testament, 39 books that were written before Jesus came, that all of them speak about him, that all of them in some way prepare us to hear and understand the gospel.

And so this is really important because when Jesus tells us that when we read these stories, it's preparing us to hear the gospel and to know more about what God is like. It means that it deconstructs, to use postmodern language, it deconstructs the patriarchal culture and the sexist culture.

[15 : 26] Jesus doesn't say, listen to these earlier books because dang it, men, it'll teach you how to treat your woman. You know, it'll put women in their place.

No, that's not what he says. He says, you read all these books that were written before me. God is the ultimate author of it and all of these books will help you to understand who I am and what I've just accomplished for you when I've died for you on the cross.

And so when we read this story, we're not reading it to say, oh, isn't that terrible about how, it doesn't, and here's the other thing which is really, really, really important, just as important as that last one.

You see, the Christian faith is all about this spectacular story that God tells us and how particular individuals like you and me enter into God's story.

It's not about abstract principles. It's not about some abstract truth. But the fact of the matter is that, you know, if Jesus tarries and my great-great-grandchildren if I'm blessed to have great-great-grandchildren and they look back on my life, they're going to say, you know, if I was to try to tell them, assuming I'm still alive and I get to tell them my great-great-grandchildren, I mean, I'm going to have to tell them all the time, well, it's not like that.

[16 : 44] Like back then, in my story, it's not like now. I'd have to keep telling them that because I have a particular life. I speak English. I live in Ottawa. I have a particular job.

There's particular ways. I have to tell them in Costco, you know, when you go to Costco, you leave your cart on one side and you walk the other side but you can go to Loblaws. That's what makes a life a life, isn't it?

Human beings don't live abstract lives. We live embodied, embedded lives in a particular story. And so one of the wonderful things is the Bible is going to tell us all these things and they're particular stories.

It's not just some abstract Ruth. It's not a fairy tale Ruth. It's not a Disney Ruth and they're not a Disney Naomi. It's, well, it's a Naomi and a Ruth who lived in a failed nation state who go to live to a particular country that worship gods in a particular way that have particular social customs.

And you know what? If God's story is going to intersect with them in their particular real life, there is hope that he will connect with me in my real and particular life. And so reading the Old Testament helps us to start to understand that, that it's important, my particular life.

[17 : 51] And I'm going to learn to follow Jesus in postmodern, post-capitalist, prosperous, none, N-O-N-E, Ottawa.

Now, okay, well, that's, now, you know, we've spent a bit of a time just trying to get into this and now we see what's going to happen. So what's going to happen to Naomi? Her life is collapsed.

In the ancient world, if you're not connected to a man and to a family system, you have nothing. You are poorer than poorer than poor.

You are poorer than dirt. You have no protector. You have no social structure. There's no, the social security network in the ancient world was connected to family and kinship and it was connected through men and so what on earth is Naomi going to do?

Well, that's what the rest of this episode is about and the rest of the whole, all four episodes. are about. But what immediately happens? Well, let's look. Verse 6. Then, then, she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

[19 : 07] So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, May the Lord deal, sorry, I skipped a bit, but Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house.

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

Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept. Now, this is quite a remarkable little thing and it introduces a word that's not translated into English.

It's actually one of the most important words in the entire Old Testament. Those 39 books that were written before the time of Jesus and I can't get the, you know, in the original language often with Hebrews it sounds like they're going to spit, like they're trying to, you know, get their phlegm going, you know, but it's *chesed*.

And it's this concept that God has this love that's unfailing, that's unstoppable, that's kind, that's loyal, that's connected to an unending covenant, an unending relationship that he makes with human beings and it's *chesed* love.

[20 : 35] And this is quite a remarkable statement. Naomi basically says, listen, my life is ruined. My life is over. I am really low and you shouldn't be connected to me anymore.

You're still young. You still got your looks. You should go back to your tribal places of origins and in the original language, mother's house is a code word for marriage.

Go back to where you can find somebody to marry and where you can find a husband. And what she does is she pronounces, it's quite remarkable because in the ancient world, basically they saw there's this close connection between the gods, the people, and the land.

And they were inseparable. Each land had its people that belonged to the land and each people and land had their own gods. And she says, she pronounces this blessing on them. She says, it costs to myself, I will be by myself, my life is ruined.

I don't want to have you, I don't want to drag you down anymore. So I'd like you to go back, go to your place, find a husband, and may the Lord, may his *chesed* love.

[21 : 46] That's what it means, it says, translated here is kindly. And even though the Lord isn't the Lord of Moab, she has this remarkable insight that somehow or another the Lord, Yahweh, is in fact also God in Moab.

And may the God that is the true God, may his relationship be loyal, steadfast, unfailing love and kindness and goodness and favor to you.

So it's actually quite a remarkable thing to pronounce this blessing and to take this cut to our own health and prosperity and it's quite remarkable.

But they react to it by weeping. They react to it by weeping. So how do they respond? They said in verse 10, and they said to her, that's Ruth and Orpah, they said, no, we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, turn back, turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? What we see here is she's going to give a bit of a reality check. Okay? Okay, right now we're having a fun time around the campfire, me and the two of you and we're all talking about old times and eating a little bit of hummus and some tabbouleh and I don't know, maybe got some goat or something like that.

[23 : 03] We're having a great old time around the campfire. This is reality check time. Okay? Girls, you know, in a sense she says, women, this is reality check time. Verse 11, turn back, my daughters.

Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope.

Even if I should have a husband this night and conceive that night and bear sons, would you therefore wait till they are grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Now just pause here for a second. This is a really important pause here. Remember I said this is a story that we have expectations, we have dreams, we have hopes, we have desires and they always go like this.

Her reality is way, way, way down here and how is she living between reality and hope? And at first it looked like she is super Christian, super godly, profound insight about the nature of God, way ahead of her culture, way, way ahead of her culture and her time and completely and utterly self-sacrificial but now we see a different side to her, don't we?

[24 : 24] I mean she, on one hand she's still being sacrificial, she gives them all a reality check but look at verse 13 again, the last few verses, words, know my daughter, it is exceedingly bitter to me that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

my life sucks because the Lord has done this to me. That's why my life sucks.

The Lord is the one who's done this and I am filled with bitterness. I'm filled with bitterness. It's a lament. Now we're going to return to this in a second.

We need to see how is it that the women respond to this lament, her blaming God and her desire that they leave home.

Well, verse 14 tells us, then they lifted up their voices and wept again and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her and she said in verse 15, Naomi says, Ruth, see your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods.

[25 : 39] Return after your sister-in-law and we'll pause in a moment here. We'll say in a moment what it is that how Ruth's going to respond to this but we see that Orpah takes her advice and leaves and Ruth clings to her and this is also a bit of a technical word.

It's a covenant word. If you go back and you read the early part of the book of Genesis in Genesis chapter 2 when Adam and Eve in a sense get married by God it says that a man shall cleave or cling or be connected to his wife and that's the exact same word here.

It's not a sexual word. It's not talking about them entering into a lesbian relationship. It's non-sexual but it's not that she physically actually holds on to her.

she might be but it's more than that. She says one moment Orpah's leaving I am actually going to commit myself to you in a way which is really really deep.

I am going to reject my mother's house I'm going to reject my tribal backgrounds I'm going to reject my dreams I'm going to reject my hopes and I want to cling to you.

[26 : 53] I mean Ruth would have had dreams and hopes and expectations like that. Many of us who are here have struggled with the fact that they'd love to have children and can't have them or can only have one and Ruth would have had all those desires and now she's going to leave and go to a foreign people to a foreign land she's going to leave her God she's going to leave her religion she's going to leave her understanding of the world and she says I want to cling to an old bitter woman with no hope and that's why Naomi says in verse 15 see your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her God's return after your sister-in-law and in these verses 16 to 17 are some of the most beautiful words in the entire Bible they really are and we'll look at them again more in a moment but just listen to these words but Ruth said to her to Naomi do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you for where you go

I will go and where 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 may the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you and when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her she said no more it's a very very powerful thing look at those just those verses again we're going to talk about it a little bit more in a moment the full implication of it but Ruth says do not urge me verse 16 to leave you or to return from following you for where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge and if you look at it later on in your own Bibles and you write it out there's five sentences and the five sentences it actually has a particular form in the original language and for grammar geeks it goes

A B C then B with a little you know apostrophe and C with an apostrophe and the very very center of this powerful phrase is your people shall be my people your God my God and then she emphasizes this that she's completely and utterly casting herself upon God by emphasizing that when you die I'm not going to go back to Moab when you die I'm going to stay where you are I'm

going to stay with your people I'm going to stay with your God even after you die I have no exit plan I have no plan B even after you die I will stay there and then in the original language it's obvious that she in a sense invokes a covenant she in a sense says in a sense if I depart from this well God should do whatever he should the Lord should do whatever he needs to do with me if I if I abandon this plan

I will never abandon or forsake or leave you I will never do that I have no exit plan it's almost unheard of in the year 1100 BC this is a conversion it's unheard of in 1100 BC unheard of well does this comfort Naomi does it sort of bring her some relief between her hopes and expectations and the reality is it some hope for her to live in that in between area between these two things does it comfort her from her accusations and her bitterness and her complaints against God no actually Naomi accepts what Ruth says but the bitterness and the hardness of living in the desert continues look at what happens in verse 19 so the two of them went on until they come to Bethlehem and when they came to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred because of them it's the talk of the town and the woman said is this

Naomi and the reason in the original language the reason they have to say it is this the ten plus years she's been gone have not been kind to her she looks old and worn down and beat up so much so that when they say is this Naomi they're actually saying looks and was healthy and young and full of hopes and dreams and now she's hunched and bent over and wrinkly and crabby and bitter looking and I'm not even sure if it's the same person in verse 20 Naomi says to them do not call me Naomi which means pleasant call me Mara which means bitter for why listen to what she says four different things why should you call me bitter the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me God has dealt he's almighty who knows what he could have done with my dreams and my hopes and my long but he has dealt very bitterly with me verse 21

[32 : 12] I went away full and the Lord Yahweh he brought me back empty why call me pleasant when the Lord has testified against me in other words he's the judge he's the witness against me he's the prosecution I have no defense attorney and he's found me guilty for some particular reason and what on earth can I do against him and the almighty has brought calamity upon me they're not going to turn this into a praise song what can I say it is filled it's a lament and filled with bitterness now there's lots of irony here so Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite they remind you once again that Ruth is in fact a Moabite her daughter in law with her they returned from the country of Moab once again emphasizing that Ruth is from Moab and for a harvest but just as all the harvest is about to come in so what do we make and what do we think about this to try to try in terms of a bit of the content well you know some of you might say okay wow wow wow

Naomi just blames God for everything and just imagine if you were there you're the Christian counselor and you have to sit with Naomi you're her small group leader you know you're her mentor you're her friend and like what would you do here's the first thing which is very remarkable could you put up the first point please rather than erasing Naomi's lament the Lord has recorded it in the Bible for you to know and for me just think about that for a second nothing in this story God doesn't say whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa pipsqueak Naomi like I didn't tell you to leave and go to the enemies I didn't tell you to leave the promised land and whoa whoa whoa whoa like why are you blaming me for this and there's no sort of very wise smart Christian counselor that comes up and immediately starts to say well you know you should think about this and you should think about this and if you reframe this and have some healing of memories here and maybe there's some intergenerational healing you need no and it isn't as if

God says whoa boy I better make sure nobody ever finds out about these complaints for those of us with a high view of the Bible and I have a high view of the Bible because Jesus has a high view of the Bible that's why I have a high view of the Bible even though in contemporary Canadian culture it makes me sound like I'm a like a knuckle dragging fundamentalist with an IQ of a turnip I believe the Bible is God's word written because that's what Jesus tells me to believe and he's the one who conquered sin and death and rose triumphant and so I believe him but if you have a high view of the Bible we believe that ultimately God is the author of this passage of scriptures that means God on purpose had it recorded isn't that astounding for a second just think about that God chose to have this written so that we would hear it it wasn't because he screwed up and said oh gosh

I meant to have that edited out how'd that get in there no he intended it to be in there for you and me to hear this and you know one of the things which is so wonderful and this by the way I'm a classic guy you tell me your problem and instantly I go into problem solving mode all those marriage

books and guy things guilty as charged I have a hard time just sort of being you know my wife will tell you I have a hard time remembering okay if Louise complains against me and criticizes me or says something about me she's doing this so she can connect closer with me I have to keep telling myself that I don't usually feel it right away because I'm a guy okay so for you guys if you don't know that if your wife says something that's because she actually wants to connect with you not push you away so I go into problem solving thing but here's the thing which is about this this story in a sense shows us the right way to respond to the lament it's what

Orpah and Ruth did all you can do is cry all you can do is stay connected to the person and what this text is saying is listen George I know you have hopes like this I know you have expectations like this I know you have desires like this I know you get some of them from the Bible some of them are good things some of them you get from Disney and superhero movies and I know your reality is way down and I know God says I know it's really hard to be in between here and what the text is telling us is George don't I know I know I know the lament of your heart and the complaints you have and be honest with me I already know be honest with me and talk to me be honest with me and in terms of us dealing with each other

[38 : 01] I mean the fact of God hasn't told you why somebody who wanted to have a job and why they got laid off or somebody who wanted to have a relationship and here they've reached a certain age and that never happened or whatever it is God hasn't made you God big news he hasn't made me God I don't know and a lot of times all you can do this text is saying it's alright to lament and complain to God and for us we don't have to explain we don't have to be frightened but maybe that's why we had the Romans text read weep with those who weep rejoice with those who rejoice it's in the Bible and that's all sometimes that's all we can do just have to be sometimes living our life we're in a desert and we're in a desert for a long what she says and it's not saying that all of her interpretation is correct but it is really modeling in a very powerful way that you just be honest but some of us might be saying

George I'm a little bit puzzled by that was really interesting I have to confess it's a bit of a surprise to me because usually I think of Christians I think they have to be just accepting or don't really want to talk about when things go terribly bad in their life and Christians just think they're successful and they think their poop smells better than other people's poop and all of that type of stuff and it doesn't if you're a guest it's just as bad as everybody else's in terms of smell and and so it's a bit of a surprise to me here to discover that this Bible text is saying that it's alright to voice your complaints to God but I'm a little bit puzzled like is Naomi a good person or a bad person you know one of the things which is really interesting is that as our ages become relativistic you know what's right for you is right for you but can be wrong for me and what's right for me can be right for me but wrong for you and it's just every one of the interesting things is that as our cultures become more relativistic we become more judgmental we divide the world into good people and bad people could you put up the next point here's the thing about the text everyone is ambiguous when you get to know them we're a room full of ambiguous people whoa what does ambiguous here mean

I don't mean ambiguous because you can't you know I guess one form of ambiguous is when you really really really need glasses and you can't tell if it's a guy or girl in front of you or your wife or a tree and so visually you're pretty ambiguous I mean ambiguous in terms of the meaning and interpretation of our lives that in fact the matter is that's one of the things which is so crazy about trying the whole modern move to try to base your identity on your feelings is always doomed to failure because the fact of the matter is is that no human being is one feeling one unchanging feeling some days I want to be like Francis of Assisi some days I want to be like Colin Kaepernick some days I want to be like Tom Brady more like Tom Brady I don't know and some other days I want to be like Einstein and other days I just want to be a faithful pastor and other days I want to be that and the fact of the matter is that we're ambiguous and what's one of the common things that people go on in terms of like maybe it's in marriages and relationships how many times has my wife said to me what are you thinking the answer in terms of how many is too many times to count and it's not because there's anything wrong with her but she just goes like

George what were you thinking like what meaning what identity what purpose were you following there I thought you were like this so you do this what were you thinking and everybody is like that you know the staff has been this we have these multiple meanings multiple interpretations and yet we are addicted to wanting to label people as good people or bad people and that's separate from the fact that you're really bad because you vote for Trump or you're really bad because you still like

Trudeau or you're really bad because you're in favor of climate change you're against climate change or that you have a hipster beard or you don't have a hipster beard or whatever the heck it is because your shoes are the wrong color like we live as our age becomes more relativistic we become far more judgmental you hardly do anything and you can start up a Twitter storm of 100,000 I've asked my friends who are into it why does anybody care I told one 100,000 people mad at me on Twitter I wouldn't even know and if I did know I wouldn't care maybe I would care I don't know I don't want to put myself up as being virtuous because I'm a good person you're all bad no that's not the point the point is that this one of the things which is so powerful about this text is this text says yes is Naomi good or bad yes why because she's ambiguous why because on one hand she has this spectacular insight to the nature of God better than Socrates better than Plato better than Aristotle better than all these other philosophers who are going to come hundreds of years later she has this profound insight about the Lord and then in the very next breath she's telling him he's a no good bleepity bleepity bleep she's ambiguous and it's really hard by the way for

[44 : 06] Christian commentators do not want to keep we want to try we're worried about her ambiguity and so we want to make her look better than she is or worse than she is because gosh it's hard living with ambiguity but here's the fact matter if everybody if you get to know them more and more isn't that the problem the more you get to know for Christians the Bible the Bible preserves an ambiguous character and doesn't rescue us or doesn't cater to our addiction to judging to make her good or bad now some of you might say gosh the time's well we'll keep we have to finish this because there's one more thing if the

Bible doesn't say the Bible doesn't end by saying so rejoice in being ambiguous and become as ambiguous as you possibly can no the Bible doesn't go there the Bible has some other things just in closing which are very very important can you put up the next point when the Lord offers you the gospel he offers unfailing love with no exit strategy when the Lord offers you the gospel because ultimately Christians believe that the gospel this news that God the Lord has done everything that needs to be done to make you right with him with nothing left off out that the power completely comes from him it's what his son has accomplished is finished it's complete it's irreplaceable it's unique and he accomplishes something with his sinless life and his suffering temptation and his death upon the cross and his resurrection he accomplishes something in eternity which becomes real in history and when

God gives you this news that if you abandon yourself to Jesus and give yourself to Jesus he gives you something there's a power that comes from God upon you that will change you for all eternity and he offers you unfailing love with no exit strategy and we can see a little bit about this in verses 16 and 17 because you see what it is I try to describe love to you this unfailing covenantal relational unstoppable love with no exit strategy and I maybe didn't do a very good job of describing to you that but here's so what's wonderful God uses Ruth to describe that to us because that's what goes on here isn't it let's look at look at verses 16 and 17 again if you could put those up that would be great remember so so in verse 13 this idea of chesed love comes up and you're wondering what is this exactly what it is that God offers to us that Ruth offers to Naomi God says in a sense to you and me do not urge me to leave you or to go away from you and then

God in a sense when he offers you and me the gospel this is where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge you know obviously he says he takes me as his people he will be my God he will be my God until I die so in Ruth's case sorry back up I haven't done this good job let's start all over again you know Ruth says do not urge me to leave you to return from following you for where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge she says wherever you are I will be your people shall be my people and your God my God where you die I will die and there will I be buried and may the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you Ruth offers to Naomi a love with no exit strategy no conditions and she offers it to

Naomi when Naomi is old and bitter with no future and no hope and it's just this no exit strategy whatsoever no plan B only this one plan I will be yours forever she embodies if you want to try to understand a little tiny bit about what it means to receive the gospel to trust Jesus then this is what God is saying to you George a month from now you might do some horrendous evil that shocks everybody I already know about it it's dealt with in Jesus you might experience unbelievable failure at least in your own eyes I already know about it and George when I pledge my love to you when I pledge that I will be your God and you will be my son by adoption and grace I will be your God

forever and ever and ever I have no conditions for you to meet into the future and
[49 : 27] I have no exit strategy in terms of my relationship with you I will never leave you or I will never forsake you and this is what I have accomplished for you in the person of my son I offer you George I offer you chesed love and we also see here a very small way but a very powerful way the very nature of what it is that God does for us if you could put up the final point Andrew please the unambiguous Lord offers his unambiguous gospel to ambiguous you to ambiguous you the unambiguous Lord offers his unambiguous gospel to ambiguous you what happens here in this exchange between Naomi and Ruth Naomi has her bitterness her defeat her impending death no resources nothing hope and

Ruth looks at Naomi and Ruth has hope she has a future she has possibilities she has options and Ruth in a sense places she dies to all of these things she says I will set all of these things aside all of the destiny that I could possibly have I will set aside and I will take upon myself this relationship with you where you have nothing to give me and I sacrifice everything I have for you and that's what Jesus does for us on the cross see that's why Jesus says when you read these stories even these stories of being in stories that help me to understand in very particular ways what it is that I have just done for you on the cross and in the cross I look at you and I look at your failure I look at your emptiness

I look at your need I look at your bitterness I look at your lack of honesty to me I look at how in a sense how unlovely you are and I sacrifice all that I have for you that you may lovely be for those of us who are Christians just pray that this will grip you and for those of you who aren't Christians and you want to know how to cross the divide just pray God may you be my God may your people be my people may Jesus be my Savior Lord there's no better time than today to say such a desert where the difference between our hopes and the reality is very great and

Father we thank you so much that you love us in the desert we love you so much that you desire us to be honest with you Father and to be able to lament before you we thank you Father that you're not peevish that you're not easily angered that you're not easily that you don't give up on us we thank you that in Jesus you would give us an unfailing unconditional love unfailing love with no exit strategy so Father we ask that those for all for each of us that you would make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel gripped by the gospel that we stand on it that it shapes us that it guides us that it propels us that it draws us so that we might learn to be free and whole as we live for your glory both here in Ottawa and to the ends of the earth and we ask this in the name of Jesus and all God's people said Amen