

Is Anyone There?

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Date: 23 September 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Judges chapter 21. Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mitzpah, no one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin. And the people came to Bethel and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. And they said, O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this happened in Israel, that today there should be one tribe lacking in Israel?

And the next day the people rose early and built there an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the people of Israel said, which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly of the Lord? For they'd taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord to Mitzpah, saying, he shall surely be put to death. And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin, their brother, and said, one tribe is cut off from Israel this day. What shall we do for wives for those who are left? Since we have sworn by the law that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives? And they said, what one is there of the tribes of Israel that did not come up to the Lord to Mitzpah? And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-Gilead to the assembly.

For when the people were mustered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead was there. So the congregation sent 12,000 of their bravest men there and commanded them, go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the edge of the sword, also the women and the little ones.

This is what you shall do. Every male and every woman that is lain with a male, you shall devote to destruction. And they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead 400 young virgins who had not known a man by lying with him. And they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

Then the whole congregation sent word to the people of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon and proclaimed peace to them. And Benjamin returned at that time. And they gave them the women whom they'd saved alive of the women of Jabesh-Gilead, but they were not enough for them. And the people had compassion on Benjamin because the Lord had made breach in the tribes of Israel. Then the elders of the congregation said, what should we do for wives, for those who are left since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin? And they said, there must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin that a tribe may not be blotted out from Israel. Yet we cannot give them wives from our daughters.

[2 : 3 4] For the people of Israel had sworn, cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin. So they said, behold, there is the yearly feast of the Lord in Shiloh, which is north of Bethel on the east of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem and south of Lebanon. And they commanded the people of Benjamin saying, go and lie in ambush in the vineyards and watch. If the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in the dances, then come out of the vineyards and snatch each man his wife from the daughters of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin. And when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, we'll say to them, grant them graciously to us, because we didn't take them for each man of each of them for his wife in battle. Neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.

And the people of Benjamin did so and took their wives according to their number from the dancers whom they carried off. Then they went and returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and lived in them. And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family.

And they went out from there, every man to his inheritance. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Ruth chapter 1, which is on page 267. That's Ruth chapter 1, page 267, beginning at verse 1.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went 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 names of his two sons were Marlon and Killian. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

[4 : 45] But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives. The name of one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth. They lived there about 10 years, and both Marlon and Killian died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

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. 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, 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, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, 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 should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were 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. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods.

[6 : 54] Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, 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. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? 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, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab.

And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Well, good morning, everyone. I think you'll find it helpful to keep that open. So if you've closed your Bible, do turn back to page 267. And there's also a little outline on the back of the service sheets, which I hope you'll find helpful as well. I've slightly changed the introduction since I sent this to Vicki, so you can ignore that question that's there under the introduction.

We won't be thinking about that, but you might like to follow it as we go on. Shall I lead us in prayer as we begin? Paul tells us in the New Testament, speaking of the Old Testament, that everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope. We pray, our Heavenly Father, that as we look at this book of Ruth, written so long ago, that this morning and over the next few weeks, you would indeed encourage us and grant us endurance that we might keep going as living as your people in this world. Amen.

Amen. Is anyone in charge? Is anyone in charge? It's a question we can ask on a moral level.

[9 : 28] Is anyone in charge of the world? Or can I just live as I like with no consequences? Or it's a question we might ask on a personal level, when life falls apart, when we suddenly lose our job? Or we get that diagnosis we dread from the doctor? Or a relationship breaks down? Is anyone in charge? Can anyone do anything about it? It's a question we could ask on a national or international level. Is anyone in charge of the direction of our country or world affairs? Or is everything just chaos? Perhaps it feels like that at the moment with the very obvious divisions in both of our major political parties. And it's also a question that we can ask theologically. Is God in charge? Or is he just distant and disinterested? Is he powerless to deal with our troubled world? Has he forgotten his promises and his people? Is anyone in charge? Is he just distant and disinterested? Is he just distant and disinterested? Is he someone in charge? Is he just distant and disinterested? Is he just distant and disinterested? Is he just someone who can bring order where there is chaos and good where there is evil? And this little book of Ruth, which we're going to be studying over the next four weeks, tucked away in the Old

Testament, deals with these profound questions. In one sense, it's a story about just one very ordinary and indeed troubled family who lived a long time ago. But on another level, it's far more than that. Because not only does God's dealings with this family reassure us about how he deals with all his people, but we'll see that this is no ordinary family. And in fact, God's plan for the whole world is preserved and put into motion through his actions among them.

It's a story that shows us that someone is in charge. God is in charge. And his promises haven't failed even when tragedy and wickedness are all around. And I think that's a great encouragement for us today, living so many years later. Now, it may seem strange to start a series in a book of the Bible by looking at the end of a book. But you'll notice Ruth begins by providing us a setting. It tells us, if you look down at verse 1, that it's set in the days when the judges ruled. The author is wanting us to realise what kind of time this was, which is why we had that first reading, as Simon mentioned, from the end of the book of Judges to give us a flavour. So just look back a page again and notice how the book of Judges, the time in which Ruth is set, ends. It ends with a refrain common in the book, in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

In those days there was no king. It looked like no one was in charge nationally. And as a result, everyone did as he or she saw fit morally, whatever was right in their own eyes.

And if you read through Judges, you'll know that that made for a pretty ugly society, a world not unlike our own. So Judges ends with the appearance that no one was in charge, with no king. But then the next book of the Bible zooms in on just one family at that time to show us that appearances can be deceptive. Because God was raising up a king. So look at the very last verse of Ruth at the end of chapter 4.

[13 : 16] In verse 17, a baby is born called David. And as we'll see in a few weeks' time, in verses 18 to 22, we get his family tree, which would have been recognised by every Israelite living at the time when this book was written. Because as we see in the final word of the book, a baby is born who grew up to be King David, Israel's greatest king, who brought peace and prosperity, order and justice to God's people. And who, of course, points forward to a greater king, his descendant, Jesus Christ. Judges ends with no king. But God was not distant or absent.

Because Ruth ends with the birth of a king who would take charge. So do you see how by providing us with a wider context in his first and last verses, the author hints that Ruth is far more than just a heartwarming love story. It's a book which focuses in on the circumstances of one family and assures all of us that faith in God is justified even amidst the darkest times we might face. It will show us that God orders the events of our lives for our good and above all has worked in history to provide a means of redemption, salvation for his people. It assures us that God is in charge and is good. And it poses us with the question of whether we'll demonstrate the same faith as this Moabite woman Ruth when we encounter life's hardships.

But it's a story which begins today with very personal questions about whether anyone's in charge. Because in this opening chapter, which we're looking at this morning, we meet a family that goes through the mill. Things start badly and soon get worse. And we're introduced to three characters in this family who react to their troubles in very different ways. And this morning we're going to look at each of these characters and their very different reactions in turn.

So first of all, we meet a man called Elimelech. And Elimelech's response is one of self-reliance. Self-reliance. Look down with me at the beginning of the book again.

Verse one. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went 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 names of his two sons were Marlon and Kilian. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. There's a deep irony in these verses. Bethlehem means the house of bread. And here we have a man from Bethlehem who's forced to leave the house of bread to find food. Famine has struck and he takes his family to Moab. Now we're supposed to be shocked at this. Famine was one of the curses God had promised back in Deuteronomy 28 if his people failed to obey him. So it was a sign of God's judgment upon his people. Of course we shouldn't be surprised they're under his judgment because as we've seen, this was the days when the judges ruled.

[16 : 38] God's people were in rebellion against him. So it's little wonder the land was experiencing famine. But rather than this curse producing the repentance it was designed to bring, this man Elimelech responds to the crisis by taking matters into his own hands. Self-reliance was his approach to a crisis. Rather than turning to God, shockingly he turns to Moab where he takes his family. Now Moab was a deeply pagan nation to the east of and hostile to Israel.

And by going there Elimelech showed a distinct lack of faith in God. For an Israelite to leave the promised land to which God had graciously brought his people and live in a pagan nation was to seek one's own solution to difficulty.

To live with the Moabites was to risk contamination with the world and its pagan idolatry. And Elimelech stayed there. It wasn't just a brief trip to Lidl to get some border for his family. No, he stays there until his death. And it's a decade before his widow returns to Israel.

And once in Moab, things get worse. Elimelech flees there to improve his circumstances. But as so often happens when we rely on our own sinful solutions, things actually deteriorate.

In verse 3, he dies, leaving his wife as a widow. And within a generation, his family have thrown away their religious distinctiveness. Because in verse 4, living in a pagan world, as again is so often the case, led Elimelech's sons to marry Moabites.

[18 : 24] Now Moses and Joshua had expressly forbidden marrying foreigners. Not because the Bible is against marrying people of other ethnicities. After all, the high point of the book comes when Ruth, a Moabite, marries an Israelite called Boaz. But she'd become a believer in the God of Israel by then. The issue was that foreigners usually worshipped other gods. So intermarrying with them would likely turn the people's hearts away from the Lord. And so it was forbidden.

But I don't know, perhaps that just seemed a bit extreme to Elimelech's sons. Or they thought their faith would be strong enough to survive. Or they just wanted to get married so badly.

Whatever the reason, they decided they knew better than God's word. And so disobeyed him. And by the end of verse 5, the family's situation has hit rock bottom.

Both of Elimelech's sons also die. And three women are now left without husbands and therefore without a means of income in the ancient world. Far from saving his family, Elimelech's actions have reaped nothing but disaster. His self-reliance in the face of adversity, rather than depending on the God of Israel's ability to provide for him, has ruined the lives of all involved.

He lived as if there was no king, and so did what was right in his own eyes. And yet do we not so easily also react to hardships with a similar attitude of self-reliance?

[20 : 06] We're faced by a problem, and we think we know best. Sometimes we pursue a solution, which is overtly sinful. Other times we simply leave God out of our thinking, assuming our own wisdom and resources will be sufficient to dig us out of the hole. Failure to pray is often the chief mark of such an attitude, I guess.

It's unlikely to be famine we face, of course. But lesser problems can still lead to similar self-reliance. So things are going badly at work, and rather than resorting to honesty and hard work to improve things, we lie our way out of the situation or blame someone else. It's not a big deal, we think, and it's the quickest way to get out of a mess. Or to pick up what happens here. Maybe we're lonely and don't trust God either to provide us with a marriage partner in his own time, or to give us the grace to be content being single. And so we follow the example of the Limelech sons and marry an unbeliever, someone with very different priorities to us.

It won't do me any harm, we say to ourselves. And they're such a nice person. And so we disobey what the Bible teaches about marriage for Christians. And can I say that I've seen some of the keenest Christians I know shipwreck their faith in this area. Or maybe that isn't the specific issue for us. But nonetheless, like Limelech, when encountered by difficulty, we flee to Moab.

We choose to go with the flow and live indistinguishably from the world around us, adopting its values, its methods of escapism, its idols. And very soon our Christian faith has been compromised.

You see, self-reliance, living as if we're in charge, is a recipe for disaster. Whatever trials life holds for us, and some of us may be experiencing real heartache at the moment, it doesn't pay to respond by faithlessly running off to the world for solutions. God's more than able to give us the grace we need to keep going. Just as he did eventually come to the aid of his people back in Israel by granting them bread in verse 6 notice.

[22 : 42] But then there's another danger we can fall into when life gets hard. And this time it's not self-reliance, but self-pity. So that's our second heading, self-pity. And this is the attitude Naomi adopts. Look down at verse 7 again. After hearing that there was food again in Israel, we're told 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. Ten years on, Naomi returns home.

But she's a very different person from the one who'd left Bethlehem a decade earlier. She's lost her husband and two sons, and is now well past childbearing age herself.

The promise of prosperity which had led her family to Moab had failed to materialize, and she'd been left a poor widow in a foreign land. Her future looked bleak.

So she begins to feel sorry for herself. Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? She exclaims to her daughters-in-law in verse 11. What good could she be for anyone in her circumstances, she thinks. And Naomi has no doubt where the blame lies for her situation, notice. Look at the end of verse 13.

It is exceedingly bitter to me, for your sake, that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me, she says. Even though many of her problems arose from wrongly going to Moab, she blames God.

[24 : 18] Rather than turning to prayer and trusting God's provision, she becomes bitter and disillusioned. And the self-pity of Naomi is scarcely any better than the self-reliance of a Limelech.

Both are, I guess, different expressions of a lack of faith. Notice, interestingly, that Naomi doesn't doubt God's in charge. She's not an atheist. Her theology is actually pretty good. She doesn't even doubt God's kindness, at least to others. She wishes Orpah and Ruth the blessings of that kindness in verse 8. In fact, it's hard to explain Ruth's remarkable faith later without assuming that she'd somehow seen God at work in her mother-in-law in previous years. Naomi knows God is sovereign and kind, but she just doubts his kindness to her.

When tested to the utmost, she simply can't believe God is at work for her good, and her faith seems to crumble. Look at verse 19. Naomi arrives back in Bethlehem, and people remember her. There's quite a commotion, and the women mutter, is this Naomi? 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, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? Strong words, aren't they? And yet it's an attitude that will be familiar to many of us. Naomi doesn't doubt God, but she does blame him for her troubles in the strongest terms. The Lord has brought me back empty. The Almighty has brought calamity upon me.

She even changes her name from Naomi, which means pleasant, to Mara, which means bitter. This was a bitter woman indeed. Now, bitterness is an ugly trait. It prevents us from seeing good in anything, and breeds self-pity as we lay the blame for our troubles at the feet of others, often God himself. We even begin to rewrite history to exaggerate our sense of unjust treatment. Look at verse 21 again. Naomi complains, I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Yet we know that was far from the truth. Naomi hadn't left Bethlehem full, but starving. What's more, the Lord had shown her grace in preserving her own life, and far from returning empty, she'd returned with Ruth, her loyal daughter-in-law.

But bitterness so often blinds us from seeing the blessings we have, and from being grateful for them. It can be so destructive, eating away at us, and damaging our faith as it does for Naomi.

[27 : 27] Well, what about us? I wonder where some, perhaps very real, hardship might have caused us to become bitter. It may be something from long ago.

When do we doubt God's working for our good, even amidst trials? Are there times we choose to forget the blessings that we do receive, and wallow in self-pity instead?

Or blame God for our circumstances, at least in our hearts? Of course, bitterness may begin when we suffer through no fault of our own. But understandable heartache can easily turn into a self-pity that puts us, rather than Jesus, at the centre of our lives, and forgets the unjust suffering that he willingly experienced for us.

Bitterness turns into a lack of contentment and trust, where we think we know better than God, where we live as if there's no king, even if, like Naomi, we know otherwise.

But as our third character teaches us, genuine faith doesn't simply believe the right things. It also perseveres in trusting and serving God, even when we can't see how he's at work.

[28 : 46] And that's the attitude of Ruth, our third main character in this opening chapter, who displays not self-reliance nor self-pity, but what I've called self-surrender.

That self-surrender, perhaps we could say self-denial. If you think about it, in many ways, Ruth is the last person in the book who we'd expect to be a model of faith.

First of all, unlike Elimelech and Naomi, she's not an Israelite, so we wouldn't expect her to trust the God of Israel. In fact, it's an indictment against Israel during the dark days of the judges that it took a foreigner, a Moabite of all people, to display true faith.

For another thing, Ruth's circumstances were uniquely grim. Not only had her husband died, so she had no one to care for her, but her chances of remarriage were slim.

Under Old Testament law, if a man died, his brother was to marry the widow. But Ruth's brother-in-law had also died, and as Naomi herself explains to Ruth in verse 12, there was no chance of her bearing another son for Ruth to marry.

[29 : 57] More than that, Ruth had no children to support her, and I think we're to assume she was unable to conceive, having failed to bear children during her ten years of marriage in Moab.

A miracle was needed to change her circumstances. And finally, faith in God required a much greater sacrifice for Ruth than it would have done for Elimelech or Naomi.

To stick with Israel's God meant trusting in an uncertain situation without knowing what lay ahead. It meant self-surrender and turning away from her home country and people for good.

It would have been so easy for Ruth to turn back to her Moabite roots. Without the more restrictive laws of the Old Testament to worry about, she was much more likely to find another husband and could have started a new life in familiar surroundings.

You see, so often, at first at least, exercising faith is the hardest option in times of crisis when we can't see how God's at work. But true faith trusts in spite of the visible and throws its lot in fully with God, even when there are easier shortcuts.

[31 : 10] And that's what Ruth does quite remarkably in verse 16. Just have a look. Naomi urges Ruth to join Orpah in returning to Moab.

But Ruth's faith holds firm. 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. It's a remarkable expression of allegiance to Naomi. It would have been easier for Ruth to return to Moab.

But after the death of her two sons, Naomi's only hope for future provision was if one of her daughters-in-law could find herself a suitable husband and bear a son to continue Elimelech's line.

And out of love and loyalty to Naomi, against all evidence that a suitable husband could be found, Ruth clings to Naomi. But it's also a remarkable expression of allegiance to the Lord, Naomi's got.

- [32 : 23] Because Ruth's faith demonstrated that she believed against the odds that God could provide for her and would work for her good. We'll see her faith in action next week.

But note that it's far more than an act of compassion for an aging mother-in-law. Ruth was deliberately turning away from her own culture and accepting Israel's gods as her God, putting her trust in him personally, acknowledging that there is a king who's in charge of the world even when it doesn't look like it.

And that's simply what it means to be a Christian, one of God's people today, of course. To put our trust in the God of the Bible personally so that he becomes my God, as Ruth puts it in verse 16.

In fact, if we're somewhere here who's still weighing up, if we're somewhere here who's still weighing up whether to follow Jesus, verses 16 and 17 are a good summary of what it means to do so. Christian faith means saying to God that we'll go wherever he takes us, identifying with his people, and surrendering all in his service.

Ruth's contrasted here with Orpah. Notice that Orpah begins the journey back to Israel. For a while, she identifies herself with God's people.

- [33 : 46] But when Naomi spells out the cost, in verse 15, we're told that she'd gone back to her people and her gods. Worshipping the true God was just too great for sacrifice.

It wasn't so much self-reliance or self-pity as self-interest that caused Orpah to reject God. And sadly, I can think of those who've started to think about Christian commitment, who've even looked like they'd set out on the journey of following Jesus, who then turned back to Moab, to the ways of the world, and the people of the world, to their old life with its gods when it's got too costly.

Jesus himself, actually, warned would-be followers of his in very similar ways to Naomi. Do you remember how when a man said he'd followed Jesus wherever he went, Jesus replied, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

And many, like Orpah with Naomi, deserted Jesus when the road became too hard. After all, it was a road that led to the cross. But not Ruth.

She clung determinedly to Naomi and to her God, the Lord. And the rest of the book will show that she had good reason to do so, and we have good reason to do so today.

- [35 : 14] So for those of us who are Christians, let's learn from Ruth's example here. You see, true faith trusts God on the basis of his character rather than our circumstances.

Like Ruth, even when things are tough or the future appears bleak, we're to cling to God, trusting he hasn't deserted us, that he's working for our good to make us more like Jesus, that he is in charge.

Rather than relying on self or feeling sorry for ourselves, we're to surrender self and to keep following Jesus whatever the cost. And wonderfully, as we do so, we can trust him.

Did you notice how chapter one ends with a hint that fortunes were changing for Ruth and Naomi, that God was perhaps working for their good after all? Because the chapter that began with famine in the first verse ends in verse 22, the last verse, with Naomi and Ruth arriving in Bethlehem.

Have a look at the beginning of barley harvest. A whole summer of food awaited back in Israel. As we'll see next week, Ruth's unlikely faith was justified after all.

- [36 : 25] So as we close, how should we respond to the inevitable hardships life brings? Well, it's interesting that the word translated return or go back comes 12 times in this chapter.

The writer obviously wants to emphasize it. Because you see, hardships cause some, like Orpah, to go back to the ways of the world, to give up their faith, at least in practice.

But Ruth, in contrast, begs Naomi in verse 16 not to urge her to return from following her. And so in verse 22, she and her mother-in-law returned from Moab to Bethlehem, to the town from where their redemption will come.

Difficult times will either cause us to turn to the Lord wholeheartedly as Ruth did, or like Orpah, they'll lead us to return to the world. So what about us?

Which way will we turn? In adversity. We've seen three very different reactions in this chapter. We've watched Elimelech respond to a crisis with self-reliance that ended in disaster.

[37 : 32] We've observed Naomi's self-pity at her plight and indeed Orpah's self-interest. But we've also seen the extraordinary self-surrender of this Moabite woman, Ruth, as she places her trust firmly in the God of Israel, leaving her old life to follow his ways.

But of course, like the whole Bible, the main character in Ruth 1 and the book of Ruth as a whole is neither Ruth nor Naomi but God himself. We don't see the Lord, not explicitly at least, at work in this chapter, but he is nonetheless pulling the strings behind the scenes.

And next week, as we dive into chapter 2, we'll turn to consider his workings and see that the Bible gives us very good reasons to imitate Ruth's faith. Let's pray that we'd be those who do that.

Shall I lead us in prayer? Then Naomi 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.

We thank you so much, our Heavenly Father, for the little glimmer we get here, that you are in charge and that you do look after your people. And we pray that you would help us to hold on to that amidst adversity.

[38 : 59] Sorry for the times when we're self-reliant or we resort to self-pity. And we pray that we would follow Ruth's example and be those who deny self, who surrender self to Jesus' rule and live with him as our King.

And we ask it for his name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. modification. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.