

When Your Opportunity Turns to Ashes

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Just going through some of these Old Testament, we'll do some New Testament as well, but the stories of these individuals who life didn't go as they thought it would. It's not because we like cigars. It's because we've been through the ashes in life.

We know what it's like to go through suffering and pain. But we also know this, that God is faithful and that he is sovereign and he meets us in the ashes.

[2 : 26] And so I hope that this series has not been a discouragement to you because some of these passages have been very heavy. I mean, last week with Job, are you kidding me?

Like the feedback from last week was just unbelievable in terms of just what we learned through an intense story of Job's suffering.

We've not only looked at Job, we've looked at Elijah, we've looked at Jonah, Joseph, Adam, how all of these individuals experienced the ashes. Tonight we're going to look at a woman because as I mentioned last week, women have problems too.

Not as many as men, but they have problems too. And we're going to look at, that's a joke by the way, okay? Some of you will be waiting for me in the, anyway, outside.

So we're going to look at Naomi. This is one of my favorite stories, one of my favorite stories in the Old Testament. And we're going to look at a woman who knows the smell of smoke. She knows what it's like to have her life turned to ashes.

[3 : 27] So stand with me if you're able to do so. In Ruth chapter 1, we're going to look at just the first few verses here. Ruth chapter 1 says, It says, Let's pray.

Let's pray together. And ask God to teach us tonight once again from his word. God, thank you for what you're teaching us in this series. Thank you for showing us a real life through these stories. And one of the things, Lord, that you have blessed us with here at Faith Family is a culture that acknowledges the hardships of life. And even though we are people of deep faith, even though we are people of great hope, we also look at the world with great realism and the suffering and the hardship that's a part of life.

But the good news of the gospel is that when we are in the ashes, God, you are with us. And you take those ashes and you turn something beautiful from them.

And so we pray tonight, you teach us once again from your word. All to the glory of Jesus. And I pray it in his name. And all God's people said, Amen.

[5 : 35] Amen. You can be seated. Finish this phrase. It ain't over. It ain't over till it's over. That was a phrase coined by the late New York Yankee, Yogi Berra.

It's a phrase that recognizes the possibility of a comeback. You may be down a lot of points. You may have experienced a significant injury.

You may be in a deep hole. The odds may seem impossible, but it ain't over. Till it's over. And all of us know that to be true because we've experienced it and we've seen it in a lot of different areas of life.

Take, for instance, sports. I mean, it happens all the time in sports. An example would be Tiger Woods winning the Masters in 2019. Some believe this is the greatest individual comeback in sports.

After scandals and DUIs and car crashes and multiple surgeries, almost everybody assumed he would never win again and certainly never win a major again.

[6 : 42] Sometimes it's teams that are down in a series. Examples would be the Cubs when they were down 3-1. They came back to win the World Series after 108 years.

The Cavs down 3-1. Come back and beat the Golden State Warriors to win the NBA championship. This one is really hard for me to admit, but I can't leave it out.

The Red Sox, gross. Came back from 3-0 and beat the Yankees to break the curse. They'd go on to break the curse of the Bambino. Sometimes teams are down too many points.

Like the Patriots were down 28-3 at halftime in the Super Bowl and came back to beat the Falcons. And it's not, I mean, I could give you so many more sports examples, but it's not just true in sports. It's also true in politics. Heading into the election of 1948, everyone was certain that Harry Truman was headed towards an electoral demise. They even told him he should quit his campaign, but he came back and won the election.

[7 : 47] It happens in sports. It happens in politics. It happens in careers. Robert Downey Jr. was arrested multiple times in the 1990s, spent time in rehab only to come back and be one of the most famous actors in the Marvel movie series.

Martha Stewart, she spent time in prison only to come back. You're not going to believe this. She came all the way back and hosted a TV show with Snoop Dogg.

I mean, that is like the comeback of all comebacks. Are you kidding me? Can you get any higher than that? Maybe my favorite is Johnny Cash, the king of comebacks.

He spent his life fighting addictions, but would always find a way to come back. Maybe his greatest one was at the end of his life. He was about blind because of advanced diabetes.

He could barely walk. He needed constant care. He had just lost the love of his life, June Carter. And on the way home from the funeral, he turns and he tells his son, I've got to get back in the studio.

[8 : 53] And four days later, Cash will be laying down tracks of what would become 60 more songs.

It ain't over until it's over. And whether that is in sports or music or career or politics or everyday life, it is not over until it's over.

But one thing that is true in every great comeback, one thing that's there in every single scenario, is that there is a point where it feels like it's over.

There's a point when it feels like there's no way you could come back. The score is too lopsided. The odds are too great. The fall was too far.

The mountain's too high. The addiction too strong. There's just not enough time left in the game. It's over. And my guess is, I don't have to guess, I know there are some of you here at Fate Family that know that feeling.

[10 : 02] For some of you, it's, I'll never get out of the debt I'm in. It's over. I'll never find someone after she left me.

It's over. I'll never be able to walk again after the accident. They'll never forgive me after what I did. Don't you see, I'll never beat this addiction.

I'll never get back on my feet again. It's over. And if you've ever felt that feeling, and I know that some of you have, some of you are here tonight and you're feeling that feeling right now.

You know exactly how a woman named Naomi feels in Ruth chapter 1. Naomi is convinced when we come into Ruth chapter 1, she is convinced her life is over because her hope has turned to ashes.

Everything she had, everything she'd hoped for, looks absolutely gone. And she has reason to think this. She has reason to believe it.

[11 : 14] Look at verse 1. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. A man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

I would describe Naomi's life as a life of famine here in the beginning of this story. What's described in the verses that we just read a few moments ago is some of the darkest in the Bible in describing Naomi's life and the circumstances that she's going through.

When you come into the book of Ruth, you're coming into some of the darkest days in the nation of Israel. Note five things. First of all, Naomi is living in a nation that has forsaken Yahweh, forsaken God.

You'll notice the phrase there in verse 1. It was the time of the judges. So right away, the reader knows that this takes place during the 400-year period following Israel's entrance into the promised land.

But the author here is not giving you this for just historical significance, but for spiritual significance. That is, the time of the judges was a time of spiritual rebellion in the nation of Israel.

[12:39] It was full of violence and war, idol worship. It was a downward spiral that was taking place in Israel's life.

Do any of you remember how the book of Judges ends? And they did whatever was right in their own eyes. Society, nationally, it has spiraled to that point.

There's no godly leadership. There's no social restraint. There's no moral order. And those of you that have been around me for quite some time, you know I'm really not a chicken little sky is falling type pastor.

I don't get up here and just every sermon is what's wrong with America. That's not me, right? Would you not agree? I rarely get up here and just tell you everything that's wrong with the world, even though there's a lot wrong with the world.

Amen? But just because I don't do that does not mean that I am not aware of the fact that the spiritual climate of America is very dark. It's very dark.

[13:38] And it's very discouraging. There's a lack of godly leadership, very little social restraint. Faith is marginalized, often labeled intolerant.

People doing whatever they want. And so whether this is exactly like the nation of Israel, my guess is most of us can look around and relate. A nation that has forsaken God.

That's what Naomi's a part of. Add to that this. There's a famine in the land. So if the nation of Israel forsaking God wasn't dark enough, add to that that there is an economic disaster taking place within the nation.

There is a famine in the house of bread. That's what Bethlehem means. In an agrarian culture, you know this, if you don't have food, you don't have money, and you don't have a way of making money, the book of Ruth comes to you in a context where people are starving, children are dying, stores are being looted, people are as desperate as they can be.

This is a very desperate time in the land. Now, this is not just a physical famine, although that's true. It's partly because of the spiritual famine.

[15:02] You see, they had turned their back against God, and because of that, God had promised them abundance. But because of their disobedience, they are now suffering the famine that's in the land.

So you see the darkness here, right? It's a nation that has forsaken God. It's the time of the judges. They're going through a famine, an economic disaster, but it only gets worse.

Number three, a spousal failure. In fact, things are so bad, things are so desperate, that Naomi's husband, Elimelech, packs up the family van and says, we are getting out of Bethlehem.

Look at what happens at the end of verse one. It says, he went on a sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The man was Elimelech, and his wife Naomi, and their two sons were with him.

They were from Bethlehem of Judah, and they went to the country of Moab and remained there. So Elimelech says, enough! Enough of the famine.

[16:07] Enough of this just scrapping to get by. We're out of here. Get the kids, pack up the bags, put them in the car. We're going 50 miles to a place called Moab.

Moab. Now, most of you, if you read that, you're like, well, yeah, I would do that too if I were experiencing a famine. If there was no food in Minnesota, well, then I'd go to Wisconsin and get some cheese or whatever, right?

But of course, if there's no food here, where I'm going to go where there is some food, but it's not that simple. And the reason why it's not that simple is because, listen, this was the promised land. This is the land that God had given to His people. You don't leave it under any circumstances. What you do is you turn to God and let God provide.

You don't leave. Leaving here, Judah, Bethlehem, and going to Moab is an act of rebellion in this family.

[17:16] So not only is the nation of Israel in rebellion, but this family is in rebellion because the Father takes them to Moab. Notice this on the screen. Elimelech is putting food over faith.

In other words, this is difficult to say because when you're in famine, when you're starving, I don't mean like your stomach's growing a little bit. I mean like you don't know how you'll get through today with enough food.

It's easy to say, man, Wisconsin looks pretty good. I mean, because my surroundings here right now are a disaster.

But what they should have done was put their faith in God to give us our day. our daily bread. It's bad, isn't it?

A nation's forsaken God. A famine, which is the worst it can get in an agrarian society. A spouse, the husband of the family, takes his family into further rebellion into Moab.

[18 : 20] And here we experience even more darkness. Note, a series of funerals. I mean, as if this isn't bad enough for Naomi at this point, it just keeps getting worse.

Watch what happens in verse 3. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. sons.

And I know that there are some of you here in our faith family that have known the deep and dark grief of losing a spouse.

I know there are people watching online and you know who you are. I was a part of your funeral.

And she will still text me now to say, Pastor, pray for me.

I don't know how to make it through the day without my husband. I'm praying for you. I've been praying for you and this faith family loves you.

[19 : 22] Naomi has lost her husband. And I realize that we're a little bit culturally removed, but in those days, a husband was extreme.

I'm not saying husbands aren't significant today. I'm just saying this was the life source in the ancient Near East and now he's gone. And you'd say, well, hey, at least she still has her sons. Verse 5. And both Milan and Kilion died so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Look here, faith family. I've told you this before. This is why I love the Bible. Because it's just so real. You don't open this up and it's just a list of fortune cookie things.

Like, you know, hey, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And just like all this blah, blah, blah nonsense. This is real life. This is real life.

[20 : 23] And this woman has experienced deep, deep darkness. It reminded me, do y'all remember, I shared this several years ago, but some of you will remember the story of Dylan McWilliams.

Remember him? He's the young man. He's probably, maybe not a young man anymore, but from Colorado Springs. Love the outdoors. In September 2015, he goes hiking at the Grandstand Canyon, Grandstaff Canyon in Utah.

Is bitten by a rattlesnake. Which would, to me, would be the worst. If I gotta go, I don't wanna go that way. He is bitten by a rattlesnake and is able to get back and survive.

July 2017, he goes camping with some friends near Boulder, Colorado. He wakes up at 4 a.m. in the morning to the sound of what he said. Sounded like somebody crunching a bag of potato chips. Except it wasn't a bag of potato chips. It was a 300 pound bear that put his claws into Dylan's head. And was dragging him. And somehow, Dylan survived.

[21 : 30] Then, April 2018, he's surfing at Shipwreck Beach in Hawaii around 7.15 a.m. He's 30 yards offshore and gets bitten by a tiger shark.

Swims to the shore and survives. Now, you do the math. Okay, I'm Tennessee. I'm a little challenged at that. But you do the math. In three years' time, Dylan was bitten by a snake, attacked by a bear, and bitten by a shark.

The odds of that happening are 893 quadrillion to one. Like, I don't know about y'all, but if I'm Dylan, I start exploring the great indoors.

Like, for the rest of my life. Just like, I like walls and air conditioning or whatever. stop going outside, dude. But here's the point.

Have you ever gone through a season where it was one thing after another? If one more thing bites me, I'm done.

[22 : 41] If one more bill comes in the mail, if one more person says another thing, if one more phone call, I'm done. you just feel like, I can't handle anymore.

That's how Naomi feels. And what she's left with, lastly, number five, is a family of foreign daughters. A family of foreign daughters.

The text says that her sons took on Moabite wives. Look at verse four. These took Moabite wives and their name, one was Orpah and the other's name was Ruth.

And that's what's going to happen when you're living in Moab, right? I mean, when Elimelech took his family to Moab, the chances were high that his sons would marry foreign women. They would marry Moabites. You know this, ladies, if you move to Mississippi, you're probably going to marry a guy like this. I mean, the odds of that are really good if you live in Mississippi, okay?

[23 : 54] It's probably named Bubba, something like that, okay? And so what's happened here is that you remember that Israel was not to marry pagan nations.

Christians. And that's not a racial thing. I've heard a lot of people take that out of context. That's not a racial thing. It's a spiritual thing.

The reason why you don't marry someone from another nation is because they worship foreign gods. And you belong to Yahweh.

It's very much, if you want the New Testament equivalent, do not be unevenly yoked. right? And so they have sinned and now what happens is, listen, listen, look at me, look at me, Naomi has nothing.

She has absolutely nothing except two Moabite daughter-in-laws. I want you to put yourself in her perspective.

[24 : 53] I want you to try to think about the darkness of this. Notice this on the screen. She is in the ashes nationally. Israel is an absolute wreck. She's in the ashes economically.

It's a famine. There's no food. She's got no money. She's in the ashes socially, lives in a foreign land, completely out of place. In the ashes relationally, her husband and sons have died.

What little family she has are foreigners she can't relate to. In the ancient Near East, there is no situation more hopeless than this one.

she has everything stacked against her. You want to talk about a lopsided score? Life is like 150, Naomi, zero.

Zero. Which leads to being in the ashes spiritually. This is, this may, it's probably not my favorite part of the book of Ruth.

[25 : 53] You got to love the Ruth Boaz story, right, Bo Hunk? But in chapter one, this is the, this is my favorite part of the story, and it tells you something weird about me.

It's when Naomi finally lets it out and tells you how she really feels. Verse 13. Would you therefore wait till they were grown?

Would you therefore refrain from marrying? This is if her daughter-in-laws go back with her. No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of Yahweh has gone out against me.

Verse 19. 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 woman said, is this Naomi? And she said, don't call me that. Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[27 : 03] I went away full and the Lord, the Lord brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

Naomi is a broken woman. This woman knows the smell of smoke. Her life has been burned down. She knows ashes in every area of her life.

So don't call me blessed. Call me bitter. God's against me.

God's hand is out. Have you ever felt that way? God, do you hate me? Have I done something wrong? Why are you so out to get me?

I went away full. I've come back empty. Let me translate that for you. Are you ready for the translation? Are you listening? It's over. It's over.

[28 : 12] My life is over. My family's over. My hope is over. over. And one of the things that I've said to you throughout this series as we've looked at these stories is what would we do if these individuals walked into faith family?

And I'll tell you this much. Here's why Naomi is a faith family woman. You want to know why Naomi is a faith family woman? Here's what I mean by that. She would be welcomed here every day of the week and twice on Sunday.

You know why she'd be welcomed here? First is this, her honesty. She doesn't walk back into Bethlehem. I'm fine. How you doing?

How was you? Oh, it was good. Here's a picture. Took an iPhone that didn't even exist then, right? Just, you know, I'm blessed. How are you? You really want to know the answer? I feel like God's against me. I feel like everything I do crumbles. I feel like life is in the ashes. [29 : 26] Oh, I love this woman's honesty. I have an enemy and his name is God, is essentially what she's saying. She doesn't put on the Christian mask or act like everything's fine.

And that's why I say that not only is she welcome here at Faith Family, but she would fit right in here at Faith Family because if we're going to have any culture at all, it is a culture of honesty about our struggle.

And if we ever get to the point where we can't be honest the way Naomi was honest about how life is hard, I don't want to be a part of it. And I hope you don't either.

Because if anything, I want this to be a Faith Family where Naomi's are welcome. And she can say what she feels. like it feels like God is against me even though you want to just say, Naomi, turn the page.

God isn't against you. In fact, he's going to show you he's not against you. But it's okay. Listen, listen, listen, listen. Come here, come here, come here. It's okay in your chapter one to feel like God's against you.

[30 : 40] and we will walk with you till chapter four of your life. Naomi is bitter. And you've seen this struggle in so many of these stories throughout this series.

Jonah, Jonah said what? God, take my life. Elijah said what? Take my life. Job said what? It would be better had I not been born and had I been born that I would have died in infancy.

Naomi is saying God is against me. There are and these are deep, deep biblical characters. What is that? Calm down.

Take a deep breath. What does that tell you about the Christian journey and how common this experience is? I'll give you this. I've read it before but it's from C.S.

Lewis. This is in his book A Grief Observed which happened. He wrote after his wife died of cancer and here's what C.S. Lewis said. The great theologian C.S. Lewis said quote Where is God when you're happy so happy you have no sense of needing him?

[31 : 49] You will be so it feels welcomed with open arms. But you go to him when your need is desperate when all other help is vain and what do you find? But a door slammed in your face and the sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside.

After that silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait the more emphatic the silence becomes. There's no light in the windows.

It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? Not that I am in danger of ceasing to believe in God. God? No. The real danger is coming to believe such dreadful things about him.

The conclusion I dread is not there is no God but this is what God is really like. And it doesn't matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist chair or let your hands lie in your lap.

The drill just drills on. And that's C.S. Lewis. And C.S.

[33 : 01] Lewis would be welcome here at Faith Family. Amen? That's why I love Naomi because she's honest. And maybe you feel like she feels that you're in a season where and I emphasize it feels like God is distant.

Now why would I say it feels like God is distant because he ain't distant. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ he is with you.

Jesus said lo I am with you always even to the end of the age. God has already said to you by putting his Holy Spirit in you I ain't going anywhere. I'm with you.

But there's going to be seasons where it feels like I'm distant. What would cause that? Just a few quick things from this text from Naomi's story and then we'll keep moving because we got one more thing that I love Naomi about but here's the first is everything is foreign.

Sometimes you feel like God is distant when you're going through a time of life where everything is foreign. You've moved to a new city. You've started going to a new church. You've taken on a new job.

[34 : 16] You've been transferred to a different school or whatever and you're in this kind of foreign land season of life and sometimes that foreignness can make God feel distant.

Second is you're in the middle of a famine. You're in a dry place spiritually. There's a fruitless faith in your life. You feel like you're kind of on that spiritual treadmill where you're just reading your Bible and you're praying the prayers and you're going to church but it just feels like nothing.

I mean absolutely nothing because you're in famine. Third is there's maybe been a death in the family like with Naomi. As I referenced earlier I know many of you have experienced deep grief and are still experiencing that grief because of a loss of a loved one or fourth you don't see a future. Like Naomi like the last if you want to get punched here's how you get punched. Hand Naomi a calendar. I don't want to talk about six months from now.

What do you mean five years? I don't have five years of a future. I don't have any hope. It's all I can do to get through today. This woman has lost all feeling of a future.

[35 : 39] She is in despair. She feels lonely and barren. This woman has lost her hope. It's turned to ashes and maybe you relate to some of those.

Maybe you relate to those in that you're in the ashes as well. But let me point out the second thing about Naomi that I love. It's in verse 8. Look at it. This is chapter 1 verse 8.

Y'all still with me? All right. We only got two more hours. Verse 8. But Naomi said to her two daughters in-laws, go return each of you to her mother's house.

May the Lord deal chesed kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

Here's the point and I got to speed up. She uses this word chesed in Hebrew. It speaks of God's goodness, God's kindness. In other words, here's what Naomi is essentially saying and I love it.

[36 : 40] It's why she is a faith family woman. She is honest about how she feels. She has no problem telling you that she's bitter and if you want to ask her for how she's really doing, she doesn't mind telling you the truth.

But she still knows God is good. I love her honesty and I love her theology. Naomi's the kind of woman that says I feel like the Lord is against me.

But God is sovereign. She won't let her feelings determine her theology. She doesn't curse God. She doesn't think he's unfair.

And here's what I love about Naomi. We saw it in Job. She doesn't chalk it up to Satan. Well, you know what?

God's not a part of this. This is just the evil one. No. What does Job say? The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Naomi in the darkest moment of her life understands that there has not been a single thing that has happened to her outside the permissive will of God.

[37 : 47] God. And so it feels like he's against me. Feels like everything I do he shuts down. But he is chesed.

He is a kind and good God. That's who he is. Notice this on the screen.

This will preach. Faith family, it's okay to misinterpret your circumstances. It's not okay to misinterpret God's character. You can feel like God is against you.

That's misinterpreting your circumstances. Naomi, God isn't against you. And he's about to prove that to you. But it's okay. It's okay to get that wrong. Come in here and just say I just feel like God is against you.

Okay. You can get your circumstances wrong. But you can't get the character of God wrong.

Because the character of God isn't dependent upon the circumstances of your life.

[38 : 54] Notice this also on the screen. This will preach. If God is only good when life is good then your life is your God. I'm going to read it again.

If God is only good when your life is good then you've discovered your God. It's your life. And Naomi won't let that be.

Her life is anything but good. Amen? But she will not curse God. The providence of God sometimes is dark.

Heaven often feels silence. You leave full. You come back empty. But it doesn't mean that God is any less sovereign or good. Well how does Naomi's story end? It's interesting the book title is Ruth and we're not even talking about Ruth or Boaz.

We're just looking at Naomi's life. How does God meet her in the ashes? He proves notice this on the screen point number three that God is always faithful.

[39 : 53] He's always faithful. Anybody just want to testify to that tonight? Like anybody got a testimony where you were in a chapter one and you've come out of your chapter one to be able to declare to everybody in this place God was faithful all along.

I couldn't see it. I couldn't feel it. I wasn't even fully certain of it but God demonstrated his faithfulness to me in the ashes.

That's what he does for Naomi. He's going to meet her in the ashes and he's going to bring out of these ashes something absolutely beautiful and he's going to finish her story and oh what a great story it is.

Three things and I'll do them quickly there's probably more than that but three things about God meeting Naomi in the ashes as we close. Number one is this the famine eventually ends and I believe that there are people watching online and I believe that there are people that were brought here tonight for this very point.

Listen God could have wiped Israel off the map but in chapter 1 verse 6 he starts feeding them again. That is this are you ready? I don't know who it is but some of you are here tonight for this very statement and I want you to look this way the famine isn't going to last forever.

[41 : 14] The famine is not going to last in your life forever. forever. This is important for you to understand that the famine won't last forever.

It will come to an end. He will return you to a place of harvest because that's what he turns in Naomi's story.

The famine ends and they come back to Bethlehem and oh how I want to tell the whole story but I don't have time but here's the point. it's because the famine ends that harvest time is going to come about and Ruth is going to be able to go and glean.

She's just so happened going to end up in the field of bohunks who is the Old Testament Rico Suave or whatever I don't know I was trying to think of something there.

I mean he's just the stud of studs and he's single and through that Naomi's story is going to start to turn around.

[42 : 21] Number two the new family is given. The famine eventually ends and a new family is given. In verse 16 of chapter 1 but Ruth said don't urge me to leave you or to return from following you for where you go I will go where you lodge I will lodge your people shall be my people and your God my God.

Ruth sticks by her side and this Moabite woman who is a foreigner a pagan submits to Naomi's God and to follow Naomi and through this Naomi will be placed into a new family family.

And not just the family like physically but the family spiritually. Do you know why? Many of you know the story. From Ruth and Boaz will come a grandchild and that grandchild Obed will be the lineage to Jesus Christ.

You can read about it in Matthew. Naomi God's not against you. He's rerouting your story to be a part of a glorious redemptive story.

You're going to be the grandmother of the one who will lead us to the king. you've been placed into a new family.

[43 : 56] Third and finally is the future gets restored. The famine eventually ends. A new family is given to Naomi and her future is restored. We've got to read this.

Look at verse 14. We're almost done. Almost done. Hang with me. Chapter 4 and verse 14. Then the women said to Naomi, blessed be the Lord who has not left you.

Anybody with me? He has not left you. What did Naomi say? God has left me. His hand is against me. He's nowhere. No, no, no. He has not left you this day without a redeemer.

And may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.

And Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. You talk about a turnaround?

[45 : 00] Listen, Naomi, in chapter one, feels like life is over. And in chapter four, her hope has been restored.

forward. She was empty. She's now full, taking care of a grandbaby on her lap.

God met her in the ashes. And God meets you in the ashes.

Do you believe that? Know this verse as we close. Psalm 34 19, look at it on the screen. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Oh, Naomi knows that verse. The many and repeated afflictions of chapter one, and God delivered her from them all.

[46 : 16] Faith family, hear your pastor tonight. Never let the darkness blind you from the faithfulness of God to you. Never let the darkness blind you from the faithfulness of God to you.

If you are here today and your hope is in the ashes, be encouraged by God's faithfulness to Naomi. And remember this, life is full of comebacks.

And it ain't over until it's over. It ain't over until it's over. Even when the score is too lopsided, even when the gap is too wide, and even when your future is too dark, it's never over till it's over.

And as Christians, we of all people should know this. Why? Because nothing looked more over than a Friday crucifixion.

I mean, my goodness, even the disciples, after all they'd seen and experienced in the ministry of Christ, even they thought it was over. And why did they think it was over?

[47 : 27] Because it's one thing to be losing a game, it's another thing to be placed in a grave. nothing looks more over than death.

But what we learn three days later is this, it ain't over till God says it's over. So, faith family, when like Naomi, your hope turns to ashes, trust and know that God is the one who decides when it's over.

Not a scoreboard, not a bank statement, not a diagnosis, not a divorce, not a wayward child, not a group of Pharisees, not even a grave. God is the author of your story and he determines when that story's over and by the way, when it is over, he promises you this, you will never know ashes again. And all God's people said, amen, amen. Let's pray, let's pray. God, thank you, thank you for these stories that are so real to life.

we relate to them, not because our circumstances are exactly the same, but because we know what it's like to be in the ashes. There are people in this faith family, they know what it's like to lose loved ones.

[48 : 42] There are people in this family, they know what it's like to go through economic disaster. There are people in this faith family, we know what it's like to look to our calendar and see absolutely nothing at all that would give us any hope.

And in those ashes, you are there. And not only are you there, you are chesed. You are kind, and you are good, and you are sovereign, and you determine when our story is over.

So God, thank you, thank you for giving us stories like this, true stories inspired by your authors to encourage our faith these many, many years later.

And God, we're encouraged by them because we're in the middle of our chapter one, or we're somewhere in the middle of our chapter two just gleaning in the fields.

And so we're able to look at these and be reminded that there is a chapter four where life is restored, and you turn, ashes into beauty.

[49 : 57] We love you, God. We trust you, God, in Jesus' name. And God's people said, amen.