

God's Display of Loving Kindness

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Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Holy, holy, God almighty, good and gracious King, Heavenly Father, we just thank you for you, your goodness and your graciousness.

Father, if anything, I pray that we'd be encouraged with the God of this universe who presents himself to us, human beings with finite, limited minds, broken, foolish, stupid hearts, and yet you continue to pursue us, you continue to lead us, and you continue to grow us.

So Father, may you continue to present yourself through this sermon as we look at these wonderful words in your most holy, precious, and everlasting name.

Amen. Please take a look at chapter one, book of Ruth. If you were with us last week, we looked at the first five verses.

The first five verses form an introduction to this whole entire book. If you did not have the opportunity to hear last week's sermon, I'd encourage you to go back, do so, for it gives us a context, the color to understanding the rest of what we are going to learn here in this book.

[1 : 28] These five verses, this introduction introduces this story as a tragedy. There's no other word for it. If you take a look at verse five, it says, Naomi's sons and both Malon and Chilion died.

Naomi's sons died. And look at how the author frames Naomi so that the woman was without her two sons and her husband.

It is difficult enough in our society to be senior of age or in the twilight years of your life and trying to make a go at it, let alone without a husband or a children or even grandchildren to bring love and hope into your life.

But to do this in a foreign country, at this time where this book was written, you would have no identity and ultimately no hope.

So this author presents to us Naomi. Loss of husband and loss of sons, no grandchildren, no future.

[3 : 05] What could God have for her? Now what's interesting is that Naomi is part of the author of her own demise.

Along with her husband, she chose to make certain decisions. Certain choices were made. The first choice that her and her husband made was that they chose not to believe God's word.

They chose to disregard the words that God had given them. They went into the country of Moab.

For lack of a better word, it was a cursed land with a cursed people.

They had been enemies against God. They had pronounced curses on Israel. Of all the places God would not want them to go, it was to Moab.

The second choice that they made was to compromise. Well, it's only going to be a short time because we need food. It seems to make sense. We have a pressing need.

[4 : 12] We must eat. So let's go to the cursed land. The compromise is they said they were just going to sojourn, but they ended up living there.

They settled there. As we will understand, they were there for probably more than 10 years. They made the choice to be foolish. Did they consult anybody?

Did they just go on their own wisdom? Or was their other families going? The text reveals that they were alone in doing this. And foolishness is defined by deciding to be the source of my own wisdom.

And the fourth matter is they made the choice to be prideful and to disobey God once again.

Well, we've compromised. We're here. The only women that my sons can marry are Moabite, even though we are strictly forbidden by our God to marry Moabite women.

[5 : 14] Well, we're in the land now. We might as well go all the way. If there's one thing that I want you to take away from this sermon this morning is how great God's love is despite ourselves.

Despite our rebellion. Despite our compromise. Despite our foolishness. Despite our pride. Despite our selfishness, stupidity.

Whatever word you want to give it. Even though these things are absolutely true of us. God continues to display loving kindness to his people.

So let's get back to this text here. Let's take a look at verse 6. This is act 1. Think of it as a play.

There's certain stages to the play.

Verse 6. Then she, being 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.

[6 : 38] 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. Now we need to remember, as we covered last week, that Israel was under judgment from the Lord.

God had promised, if you worship, you are true to me. I will keep your lands plentiful with food. However, if you reject me, reject my counsel, and chase after foolish, foreign, false gods, you will be given a warning, a curse.

The book of Judges describes that this was a time where people did what was right in their own eyes and forgot what the Lord had done for their forefathers.

And one of the ways that God would bring judgment on his people to call them back to him was to hold back the reins that would produce the fruit of the grain.

The fact of the matter is, they were to be dependent on their God to be their ultimate king forever and to depend on him for everything.

[8 : 03] So here we find in verse 6, in the face of God's judgment, we see God's faithfulness for his chosen people. Notice verse 6.

It says that Naomi had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord visited his people and given them food.

What we see here is God doing is bringing food to his people. It said he visited them. Now what's interesting is that there's no indication anywhere in the text that God was responding to a repentant heart.

There is no indication that they were sorry. There is no indication that they were grieved for how they were, that they had forgotten about him, that there was no indication that they had all of a sudden done all the things that was required to them in judges.

It simply says, the Lord purposely visited on his people and gave them blessing.

[9 : 11] Our God. My friends, if for people who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, you need to understand that God's desire is to bless you, to bless you spiritually.

For you are his children. As you want to bring blessing upon your children, God is the same way with you and me. He cares for our lives.

He wants what is best of us. Sadly, sometimes, some of us wonder if we are cursed. That perhaps that God's love stops at the cross.

That God just cares for us enough to get enough people saved, but he does not care for us beyond the cross. That is a lie. The reality is that God continues to love us today and cares for us.

Now, it states here that Naomi was in the fields of Moab when she heard this news. I wonder what she was thinking.

[10 : 26] So here's an aged woman now having to work in the fields of Moab. There's nobody taking care of her. I'm sure she was distressed.

She was sore. And she's trying to eke out this meager existent with her two daughters-in-laws. But we read here that her ears were for home.

We've been like that when we're rebellious, haven't we? Even though we continue in our sin or our stupidity or foolishness or rebelliousness, there's still that ear for God.

There's still that ear for his goodness. We still have thoughts of yesteryear of God's promises. We're still listening what is going back.

But we read here that her ears were on the promised land. One thing that she know that is true is that God's promises for blessings are just as sure as God's warnings for sin.

[11 : 52] I know personally myself when I'm in times of distress, I need to think purposely about when times were better where God was faithful, fruitful.

I don't look at me but I just like when I say think of me, I don't think of me oh, I did these really good things and God blessed me. I think of those times where God came through for me despite myself. The reality is my past is not without pain. The reality is most of it is my doing. Yet somehow, some reason, God cared for me and he still takes care of me.

You see, I believe this is why the Lord has his people as we read as they go through the promised land or even in the wilderness to build these little altars not for worship but to remind themselves of his goodness because we are short-term memory people.

The reality is God's people saw or read or heard that their people were from Egypt and God visited a plague on Egypt that as they were crossing the Red Sea getting away from Pharaoh God parted it for them not only that he destroyed the army.

[13 : 24] They also know the story that God took care of them in the promised land. He gave them food. He gave them light by night with a pillar of fire and a cloud of smoke every day.

They had a visible God manifestation in their lives every single day. The manna and the quail constantly feeding them.

And yet they forgot they complained and they grumbled. Reality is are we so different?

How many of us have lost our way in the wilderness only to have God as he does with Naomi show himself faithful drawing us back with his loving kindness.

Now I want you to note the word Yahweh had visited his people. This is God's personal name.

[14 : 27] It's not the impersonal God who just made the rain fall but there's a purposefulness to this God.

This is a God who they know personally. It tells us of his character and it tells us that his love and his promises are eternal and they're active and that God hears our cries.

He sees our tears and in this case he sees his people in need and it tells us that Yahweh is purposeful and personal in his provision for Israel.

He loves them. He made a covenant with them. He would be their God and like any good parent who loves his child God is calling Naomi home with his kindness with his love with his promises.

for those of you who are in the wilderness you know who you are. The reality is God is always calling you. He's calling you away from foolishness.

[15 : 47] He's calling you away from sin. He's calling you away from rebelliousness and he's calling you into that personal relationship of promise with him.

You see even though you may have created your own disaster God wants you walking with him. And this is what we see Naomi do in verse 7.

It says as they went on their way to return to the land of Judah. Now if you are listening to this sermon and you are not a believer in Yahweh the God of the Bible Jesus Christ Christ the human person of the occasion by God who is fully man and fully God let me tell you for a second where you stand with God.

The Bible tells us that you are not neutral. There is no one neutral before God. In fact Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 tells us where our place is before God.

The Bible tells us that we were enemies of God before we became his children. We were under wrath, under judgment. There is no neutral I'm seeking or searching after God.

[17 : 15] If you're unsure of where you stand with God ask someone who sits outside of you. What do they see when they look into your life?

Do they see a person who worships God as their Lord Heavenly Father or someone who worships themselves or other ways of this world?

But if you are listening to this and you are interested in what it takes to become a child of God, I encourage you to be here next week because we are going to cover over an in-depth look of what it takes to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

But for now I want you to stick with the story so you can know more about God. So let's take a look at verse eight. It says, But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law. So she's in the fields.

She's heard that God has visited her people. She's making a decision to go back home. But she still has these two daughters-in-law who are of a foreign land, a foreign people.

[18 : 26] Notice that verse eight begins with the but. But is a powerful word, isn't it? Is it followed with an excuse or is it followed with a reason?

I don't know, did Naomi think this when she got out of bed that morning, kind of contemplated that news decided to pack up, go back home, or was she already making her way to the border?

The Bible doesn't say, but it just says simply in verse seven that she and her daughters-in-law went on their way to return to Jerusalem.

And we know that these roads weren't very good, but I kind of wonder if they had like an official border crossing. You know, think of it that when we come into Canada, there's a border crossing, there's border patrol, immigration, all these people that are there.

And we have to go through security checks. Scripture makes no mention that these things happen here. But I wonder if the but that we read in verse eight happened at the border, the border to the promised land.

[19 : 50] She was ready to go to her country, her people. She would have looked behind her and she would have seen her two daughters-in-law, the Moabite women, the cursed people.

What a reminder of her stark, foolish, rebellious decisions. she's going back to the land of promise. Not only is she going back with no husband, no sons, no grandchildren, but she's going back home with two Moabite women.

And if they stayed with her, they would be a constant reminder of her sin, of her foolishness, or rebelliousness, or Elimelech, her husband, who just made stupid, dumb, foolish, rebellious decisions.

You see, this is exactly what Satan does.

[21 : 06] You'll find when you are making a decision for the Lord, you have resolved in your heart to do something, Satan will come along after you with something.

Satan will whisper words of shame, him. He will tell you, you are not good enough, you are not worthy enough. He will want to remind you of your past sins, your past deeds, your past foolishness.

After all, who wants to be reminded of their disbelief, compromise, foolishness, and pride, right? And then we start to think, can God really redeem my bad decisions?

I've got an old friend's couple, they have four kids, they have struggled in their marriage, their first child was born out of wedlock out of their four sons.

And whenever they came to church, they always felt dirty, not worthy. and you never would have known it. They kind of put on that air of a perfect family, but it was something that nagged and nagged and nagged at them.

[22 : 29] And even though their oldest son was their son, he was a constant reminder of their sin. And there was a, they were having problems, behavior problems with them, and not a rebellious type of behavior problems, but other issues in regards to him.

And what was interesting, the big change that happened in their lives is when they both got on their knees and they got, they asked God for repentance to forgive them for not believing they were fully forgiven.

And it was almost after they prayed that exact prayer, absolutely everything changed in their life. Their son was not a reminder of their sin, but the son was a reminder of God's goodness and love for them, that even though they were desperate, foolish, young, stupid, all those things, and instead of representing that, he now represented God's goodness to them.

And all those behavior issues that they had disappeared. Disappeared. Disappeared. Perhaps Naomi was afraid of what her friends and family would say.

If there's anything that I can tell you, is that when we go back home, we usually feel embarrassment for our sins and our foolishness. But I'm going to tell you one thing, and I hope you take this and understand it, that God is in the business of redeeming bad decisions.

[24 : 11] God is in the business of redeeming foolish decisions. God is in the business of redeeming sinful decisions. You see, the reality is, if you hear God calling to you, but worried what others will think, who cares?

You will ultimately stand before God as your judge, not men. See, the reality is, God wants every part of you. He doesn't want you holding back on some other area or not giving it to them because of your fear, your embarrassment, your lack of joy, whatever it represents.

God wants it all. And it's interesting when it comes to confession. Sometimes it's easy for us to confess the big things, but it's very difficult for us to confess the small things.

things. What I mean by that, I have a friend who sadly had committed adultery, and he confessed, he repented, I was wrong, I made, you know, comes to the church, shows up at the church, wants to confess all these things, confessed with his wife.

But what was interesting is that although he was willing to confess the big things, he hesitated to confess the small things. Small things as the overloaded work schedule for putting work over family. [25 : 46] He would not confess for his messed up priorities, his foolish travel, not having an accountability partner with him. He didn't want to confess his friendships with other women that he had.

And he did not want to confess that he hadn't been in the word. You see, sometimes it's those little nitty, itty, gritty everyday things that we truly need to confess.

Sometimes it's easy to confess the big ticket thing, but it's those smaller things. So Naomi, as she's coming back, she's not only needing to turn her back away from disbelief in God, but her compromise, her foolishness, and her pride.

pride. The reality is, the lesson is, when we confess, we need to go all the way.

God wants it all. There's no hiding with him. So here, perhaps at the border, she makes a plea to her daughters to return home.

[26 : 57] Verse 8, go, return each of you to your 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 be fine rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed him, 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? So the idea of her turning back, they've already gone a distance. She didn't tell them in Moab. She's having this discussion while she's on the way to the promised land. Turn back.

I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even as 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 for me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

[28 : 01] 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.

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.

When Naomi saw that she, being Ruth, was determined to go with her, she said, no more.

So here we see two choices, two decisions. One daughter-in-law goes back home, and one clings to her.

[29 : 10] I'm not too sure that Naomi is thrilled about this. Notice it doesn't say she's thankful.

There's no thank you. I'm grateful to have you with me for the company, for the love, for the tenderness that you have pledged your life. The text simply said, she said no more.

The force of this language indicates that she simply stopped talking and said nothing more to Ruth. Here's the lesson, my friends. Sometimes God's love is demonstrated in our life and the things we do not notice, even in the things we may not even appreciate, even in the people we do not want with us.

Some people are proofs of our mistakes, our foolishness.

[30 : 35] Perhaps these aren't the friends that I really wanted, the husband I really wanted, the wife I really wanted, or I thought I deserved. But what's interesting is that God often uses the visible proofs of our sin, rebelliousness, hopelessness, stupidity, all those things to bring us back to God.

To make us rely on him. See, the fact of the matter is these mistakes can be wonderful testimonies to how good God is rather than how sinful and foolish we have been.

Just like I shared the story of my friends with their child. Their child is a growing, great young man for the Lord. And now he's a testimony of God's faithfulness and love and forgiveness to them rather than seeing as a reminder of their sin.

So let us continue in 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? Naomi. So here is Naomi at least 10 years later. For lack of a better word, she returns bruised, beaten, battered.

[32 : 19] She has experienced pain, sorrow, grief, regret, poverty, loneliness. No husband.

No husband. No children. No grandchildren. No hope. Now I want you to pay attention to the phrase, the whole town was stirred.

It could also be interpreted as hummed or buzzed. It's used in the same way in 1 Samuel 4, 5, upon the return of the ark of the Lord, or 1 Kings 1, 45, at the coronation of Solomon.

It is not a gossipy, murmuring type of stirring. It is actually an excited type of noise. There is a hope, a happiness, a gladness.

Did you hear the good news? It's noise raised up from people who care, who love, who know Naomi.

[33 : 35] In a way, the Lord has fashioned a sort of homecoming for this hopeless woman. It's kind of unexpected, but when we read the stories in our Bibles, we see, just like when the prodigal son returns, he did not expect a dinner.

He thought he would be treated as a servant, yet there was a festival, a party, a celebration of his return. We see these in the parables of the lost sheep or the lost kind.

The shepherd rejoices at the lost sheep, the lost coin. And it's the same way in our churches. When someone returns to us after being in the foreign land, whether it's rebelliousness, foolishness, hopelessness, whatever drove them there, when they come back, we rejoice.

We're excited to see them. So here, we see God's kindness is displayed in the loyalty friends and family have for us.

What God's people have for us. Naomi's response, verse 20, She said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[35 : 04] 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?

Now, I want you to know right away that she's telling them her shame, right? Call me Mara, which is bitter. Now, many commentators have debated what she's speaking, and that they believe that this speaks of her attitude.

Perhaps she was bitter, or ungrateful in some sense. However, I do not believe that is what's happening, and we're going to cover a little bit about that next week.

But she's just making some truthful sayings. Notice the term Almighty God. Almighty is the word that we use that God is sovereign and powerful, that he has created, is God Almighty who does these things.

And by recognizing him as Almighty, she's recognizing that it is God who controls the show, and God is right in denying or not giving her what her heart wanted, but what gave her truth and righteousness.

[36 : 27] She's admitting that she, how do I say this? She's not saying that God did wrong. She's saying that God was perfectly, powerfully, sovereignly right with what had transpired to her.

She chose to sin, and by doing this, you choose to suffer. God makes good on his promises as he does with his warnings.

You see, in her statement, she recognizes that the Lord is the one who brought her home. The Lord brought me back empty.

She's back to the personal, the God who knows her, who cares for her. But it's the text, when you read it in your version, it says, the Lord brought me back empty, could almost be rendered empty, the Lord brought me back.

God isn't the reason she's empty. Do you understand? God didn't make her empty to get her there. She got herself there.

[37 : 52] She was empty. And then we see, the Lord brought me back. Many comment that she's not being repentant here, but having a complaining heart.

However, I want to believe that her repentance is found in her desire to return home. Kind of that piece by piece repentance. Her bitterness is in admitting that life has been tough.

No longer call me Naomi, which means pleasant, but Mara. I'm here not because of my wisdom, not because of my desperation, but because God brought me here.

Remember, as I said, the prodigal son, he believed that he should live as a servant. That he needed somehow to atone for his sins or because of his sins. That the love that he once had could never be had.

And I believe Naomi is demonstrating the same type of attitude here. Life is tough. I made some bad decisions. Do not look upon me in the old person who I was, who believed in God.

[39 : 08] Look at me now as the person who didn't believe in God. The bitterness. Isn't that such a human response, right?

We believe we need the pain and punishment. And upon returning to the Lord, we believe there needs to be some kind of penance paid. We repent, but we're still expecting more pain, more punishment.

And we don't argue it because we know we rightfully deserve it. That we don't rightfully need to be freed from our prison. We do not need to be freed from our shackles of sin.

And sometimes we cry, here we are, God, just beat me up some more. You have every right. This is what repentance looks like. Now, if you think that way, you are right to think that you deserve it. Right? But, you are wrong in your understanding of God. You see, when you say those things, you are actually trying to atone for your sins, your poor decisions, your missteps.

[40 : 24] And the fact of the matter is, you can no more atone for your sins as a believer than you could when God saved you. You see, there is no debt that you can ever pay to God that would atone for anything.

There's no righteousness, there's no salvation, nothing comes outside of God. There are no rules to follow, no works to do, no right living that you can do to earn God's salvation.

And this is where we get stuck. We recognize all those wicked things about sin and we know we don't deserve it. But yet, instead of walking in the wonderful grace of the umbrella of God's grace and there's a toning sacrifice that happens at the cross, we walk in our own umbrella of destruction, discouragement, and depression.

We are so messed up. It's like we come to this cross and before I get too close to God, I'm going to run away, I'm going to clean myself up, I'm going to take all that dirt off, I'm going to pay what I need to pay, I'm going to go say sorry who I need to say sorry to, and then I'm going to run back to this cross and I'm going to say, hey Jesus, it's me, aren't you proud of me?

I'm all cleaned up now, I'm worthy of this cross. There's only one person that's ever been worthy of the cross and his name is Jesus Christ.

[42 : 11] He was hung and crucified on that cross. And because he was hung and crucified as God's one and only perfect son, he did so we could come through the blood, the cleaning that only he offers us.

If we could do it, we would have no need for the cross. Jesus would not have needed to come to this earth.

He would not have needed to be crucified. He would not have needed to be tempted, to be hurt, cut, stabbed, falsely accused.

accused. We cannot make right what God has already made right.

See, at that moment of salvation, we were declared clean, we were declared righteousness. Not based on any prayer, work, or any man thing that we could do.

[43 : 23] But because God granted us faith, and we believed, and in our heart, we understood that Jesus Christ, Yahweh God, personal God, died for me.

The Word became flesh, walked among us, lived the life that we could not live. As one writer writes, trying to explain when we clean ourselves up, he says, moral formation is the most common and seemingly effective human solution to the problem of sin without having to become aware of sin, without having to become aware of and deal with it before God.

You see, when we try to clean ourselves up, it means we're not really aware of our sin. You see, in this text, we see God's kindness.

The Hebrew word for kindness is hesed. We don't have a word that directly translates from it, but it encompasses these qualities.

God's covenant faithfulness. God's grace. That God is faithful to us because he promised he would be faithful to us. It encompasses God's mercy, God's grace, God's love, God's loyalty.

[45 : 04] You see, these are the acts of devotion and loving kindness that go beyond the requirements of duty. this is a kindness that is beyond us.

Yet we are to be eternally grateful and thankful for. So Naomi, and we're going to get this picture through the rest of Ruth, she understands her position position before God.

I have no right to call myself Naomi, but I call myself Mara. And notice what it says in verse 22.

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.

Sounds like things are going to change for Naomi, don't they?

[46 : 27] Maybe you're at that point in your life too that you are broken of everything. And you can get to that point that Naomi is that you are bitter, broken, without God.

but you want God. You want His loving kindness. What you need to do is not try to earn it, but to cry out for it and wait for it.

We'll talk more about this in the next several weeks. Let's pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, what an incredible God that you are.

rich in faithfulness, rich in mercy, rich in grace, rich in love, rich in loyalty. Father, so many of us have been foolish, stupid, rebellious, sinful, going our own way rather than following your way. Father, sometimes we look around and we see testimonies of foolishness. Maybe we look around and we don't see much of anything and that testifies to our foolishness. unwise, how we used our resources.

[47 : 49] Sometimes we see our health, recognizing we did not steward it right. Father, there's a great many things that we need to be thankful for.

Father, as we come into this week, I pray that you will continue to bend our hearts to you, that you will work in us to mend our relationships with you, to mend our relationships with one another.

Perhaps we're harboring bitterness because we haven't heard from someone, we don't feel we've been heard or we feel ignored. Lord, Father, let this be the first step to understand that we deserve nothing and that you alone promise everything to us and that can only be found in you.

So, Father, on this worshipful Sunday morning, pray that we would come to you confessing all, not holding back, not willing to confess the big ticket items but the small ticket items as well, knowing that you know us and you care that you are Yahweh.

You are not a distant God but a personal God. We're thankful, we are thankful for this word. May you give us greater understanding into its truths.

[49 : 20] In your most holy and precious name, Amen.