

# Three Returnees

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Date: 06 February 2022

[ 0 : 00 ] Let us sing to God's praise from Psalm 107, page 143, if you're using the blue book. Psalm 107, and the Singed Psalms version, page 143.

Oh, thank the Lord, for He is good. His love endures always. Let those whom God redeemed say this.

Those rescued by His grace. He saved them from their enemies and brought them from the lands, from east and west, from north and south, save from oppressing hands.

Some wandered in the desert wastes, not finding any way to reach a city where they might obtain a place to stay.

Their life and strength were ebbing fast in thirst and emptiness. Then in despair they sought the Lord, who saved them from distress.

[ 1 : 13 ] Straight was the path He led them on, a city to attain. So for the Lord's unfailing love, let them give thanks again.

And for the awesome deeds of power, which He for them achieves. For hungry souls He fills with good, the thirsty He relieves.

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Then in despair they sought the Lord, who saved them from distress. Straight was the path He led them on, a city to attain.

So for the Lord's unfailing love, let them give thanks again.

And for the awesome deeds of power, which He for them achieves.

[ 3 : 55 ] For hungry souls He fills with good, the thirsty He relieves.

Let us engage in prayer. Let us engage in prayer.

Eternal God, we pray for the spirit of true praise. A spirit that would recognize the ground for praise as expressed by Thy servant in the words that we have newly sung.

God is good. God is good. God is always good. Irrespective of how we may read our providence and our circumstances, God is good.

God is good. And we thank Thee for the redemptive power that resides with Thee. God is good. So that a people come from the north and the south, from the east and the west.

[ 5 : 16 ] A people in whom the spirit of praise has been placed through the wondrous working of Thy Holy Spirit in applying the truth to their lives.

earth. We thank Thee for every person who has been directed to the tree of shame by Thy word and spirit, and have there beheld the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

O Lord, help us always to see him. Help us to see him there, in that place of ridicule, in that place of shame, in that place of suffering, in that place of abandonment, as he experienced the curse in all his awfulness.

As he experienced death, in order that a people, who are now called the redeemed, might experience glorious life.

Grant, O Lord, that we come before thee this evening, with thanksgiving in our hearts, for the deliverance, the marvelous deliverance, that has been executed by him.

[ 6 : 54 ] That we might find ourselves among those who are designated the redeemed of God, those who have been bought back, with the price of the shed blood of the Lamb of God, and who are eternally indebted to thee, for thy great goodness to them.

Bless, we pray thee, every home, represented here this evening. those who may be watching via the YouTube link.

We commit them all to thy care and keeping. We pray for those who may be experiencing ill health, whether physically or mentally.

Those who may be struggling. those who may feel that they cannot cope with the stress that ill health inevitably brings into lives.

O Lord, we pray that thou wouldst draw near to all such, for thou art able to do for them, above and beyond what we can ask or think.

[ 8 : 12 ] Bless those who are frail, those who may be drawing near to the end of life's journey. O Lord, may they know that they are in the arms of one who will not leave nor forsake, who will constantly uphold and enable them to cross the Jordan of death and bring them safely into thine own eternal presence.

Bless those who may be anxious and concerned about loved ones, who may be involved in nursing care, in providing for them.

Grant, O Lord, that thou wouldst uphold them and strengthen them. Bless those who may be grieving the loss of loved ones and who may be struggling to cope with the empty place in their home and in their lives.

O Lord, may they know that there is one to whom they can always come, one who promises to uphold and sustain.

The empty place may not be filled in the way that they might wish, but thou art able to do for them in a way that is above and beyond their asking or thinking.

[ 9 : 40 ] Grant thy blessing upon the congregation. Bless thy servant whom thou hast placed over them. Uphold him and strengthen him in the duties that devolve upon him.

Grant, O Lord, that he might know that he has been upheld by thee, that his soul be deeply refreshed, out of the well of truth, as he seeks to minister to this large congregation, to break down the word of life.

Grant, O Lord, that he might know that thou art with him, going before him, leading him and guiding him, blessing the seed that is sown, and bringing about growth in the lives of men and women and boys and girls.

Bless all that is done amongst the young people, amongst the children, all those who are involved. Lord, we give thee thanks for every person who is involved with children's groups, with youth fellowships, with Sunday school, all who give of their time and energies to spread the message of good news.

O Lord, grant that that message of good news, that it be brought into other hearts this evening, who are strangers to its power, that they may taste and see that God is good, and who trusts in him is blessed.

[ 11 : 23 ] Bless the branch of thy church that we represent in the world. Prosper thy cause, we pray thee. Cleanse in the blood. In Jesus' name we ask it with forgiveness of sin, Amen.

Let us now read from the Old Testament, from the book of Ruth, and chapter 1. The book of Ruth, and chapter 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, the name of his wife Naomi. The names of his two sons were Melon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab, and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

[ 12 : 36 ] These took Moabite wives. The name of one was Arpah, the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Melon and Chilion 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.

[ 13 : 53 ] 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 for 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 Arpab 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.

[ 15 : 04 ] 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.

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 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.

[ 16 : 07 ] 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? 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.

Amen. And may God bless to us that reading from his truth. Let us further sing to his praise from the first version of Psalm 25 in the Scottish Psalter, page 232.

First version of Psalm 25 at verse 14. Psalm 26. With those that fear him is the secret of the Lord, the knowledge of his covenant he will to them afford.

[ 17 : 23 ] Mine eyes upon the Lord continually are set, for he it is that shall bring forth my feet out of the net.

Turn unto me thy face, and to me mercy show, because that I am desolate and am brought very low.

My heart's griefs are increased, me from distress relieve. See mine affliction and my pain, and all my sins forgive.

Let us sing these verses with those that fear him is the secret of the Lord. With those that fear him is the secret of the Lord, the knowledge of his covenant he will to them afford.

Mine eyes upon the Lord continually are set, for it is that shall bring forth my feet out of the net.

[ 19 : 09 ] Turn unto me thy face, and to me mercy show, because that I am desolate and am brought very low.

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Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The book of Ruth, chapter 1, and we may read again at verse 7.

So she set out, that is, Naomi, 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.

[ 20 : 45 ] And particularly these words, they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

Before I draw your attention to the resolve of the three women of whom the writer speaks, I'd like to draw attention to the number of times the word return occurs in the context.

Verse 6, verse 7, verse 8, verse 10, or even a variation of the word return.

Turn back, verse 11, 12, 15, 16, 22, two times. So I would suggest that this section of the chapter is about returning.

That, I believe, is very significant. Returning. But the return journey of these three women is so very different.

[ 22 : 07 ] We are told two times that they lifted up their voices and wept. People weep for different reasons.

For example, because of difficult providence. People weep when they are emotionally upset.

People weep when faced with partings from those whom they love dearly in life.

People can even weep under the proclamation of the gospel and of itself. It is no indication of a heart broken by grace or of mourning over sin.

I repeat, of itself because I wouldn't want to discourage anyone. Nor must we think that weeping is merely a gender issue.

It is three women weeping in this passage and some might be tempted into thinking that weeping is a female trait.

[ 23 : 16 ] As if men never weep. Not so. We know from the Bible that men also wept.

Abraham wept on the death of Sarah, his wife. Joseph wept when he saw his young brother Benjamin.

David wept on the news of his of the death of his son Absalom. In the New Testament, Peter wept on denying Christ.

Jesus himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. And so the writer here tells us of these three women weeping. It was a highly charged, emotional moment and partings in life can be just that.

However, I would like to suggest that their weeping is not merely to be understood as a result of an impending emotional parting.

[ 24 : 28 ] In my view, they wept for different reasons. And I'm going to suggest that Arpa wept because she regretted leaving Moab and so she returned.

Ruth wept because she regretted that she had not left Moab before now. She was reborn.

Naomi wept because she regretted that she ever left the land of covenant promise. She was being restored. And I hope that reflecting briefly on their lives will help us to read our own lives more honestly in the sight of Almighty God.

In fact, I believe the stories of Arpa, Ruth, and Naomi represent three very different but very common responses to the Lord, especially in his sovereign providential dealings with us, particularly when suffering and hardship occur in our lives.

In Arpa, we might say we have a picture of the nearly persuaded. In Ruth, a picture of one fully persuaded.

[ 25 : 53 ] And then in Naomi, a restored, backslidden believer. What prompted their intention to return to the land of Judah?

And we are told Naomi had received word that the Lord had at last visited his people in Judah and provided food for them.

We don't know how long that news took to filter through or how it was communicated to her. She heard it in the fields of Moab.

The famine in the land of Judah was, I believe, a consequence of divine discipline. it was designed to awaken the people of God and call them back to himself.

The discipline of God is only ever temporary in the lives of his children. And God has again visited his people in Judah and mercy and provided again their daily bread.

[ 27 : 00 ] Moab was supposed to be the land of plenty. Instead, for one family, it was the scene of deep anguish and devastating loss.

It was the place of great pain and grief. And now that the Lord has visited Israel, Naomi resolves to take the return journey along with her daughters-in-law.

And so we have three returnees. And I'd like to continue the use of alliteration.

First, the rejectee. Secondly, the reborn. And third, the restored. The rejectee, Arpa.

Let's think about Arpa's story first of all. Look at verses 6 and 7. The three women set off together for the land of Judah.

[ 28 : 08 ] Naomi knows that she can offer her daughters-in-law no prospects of improvement in their destitute circumstances should they continue and remain with her.

And so she urges them in verse 8 to return each to your mother's house. may the Lord deal kindly with you. And there is a word used there in the Hebrew that occurs frequently, the word chesed.

And it's an important word in this little book. 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. there is nothing acrimonious about this proposed separation.

You know how some people, and I think it's merely a myth, speak of a mother-in-law syndrome.

Well, there's no evidence of a mother-in-law syndrome in this party.

[ 29 : 17 ] Naomi blesses her daughter-in-law. She invokes the covenant name of Almighty God. She desires that they may experience the chesed of God, the loving kindness of God.

It's a word that is difficult to translate in the English language, and yet it's a word that is so full in the Hebrew language.

She seeks to send them home, back to their Moabite families, and Naomi appears to believe that their best hope of a better life lies in finding new husbands for themselves.

She knows it would be extremely unlikely, humanly speaking, that any Israelite would even notice a widowed Moabite girl.

To be a Moabite, not to mention a Moabite widow in Judah in these days, was to be marked as an outcast, an outsider.

[ 30 : 24 ] So, in verses 8 and 9, Naomi appears to be trying hard to spare her daughters-in-law. As she sees it, the grief their circumstances would inevitably entail.

And look at the initial reaction to Naomi's first speech on the part of these two Moabite women, it tells us at the very least that these three have become very close to one another, doesn't it?

She kissed them, they all wept together, and both Ruth and Arpa say, we will return with you to your people.

Naomi is insistent in her response that the women will not follow. Turn back my daughters, verse 11 to 13, why will you go with me?

Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may become your husbands? And this is the moment of decision. Naomi's language at one level appears strange.

[ 31 : 39 ] She is encouraging them to return to the country of idolatry. God's blessing was associated with the land of promise, not the land of idolatry.

I should say not the country of idolatry because land and country are very significant in this little book. The bread of God is not to be found in Moab, but in Bethlehem, the house of bread.

And Naomi on one level is telling her daughters-in-law here, there is no possibility of happiness for you if you come with me. The situation is hopeless, return.

And now look carefully at verse 14. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again, and Arpa kissed her mother-in-law.

It was a parting kiss. Affectionate it may have been, but it was the kiss of separation nevertheless, and the consequences for that young woman were dire.

[ 32 : 48 ] The kiss was indicative of Arpa's rejection of life with the people of God. She refused to be associated with the people of God.

And as verse 15 makes plain, that was the moment in which Arpa turned back. She returned, but not with Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem Judah.

She takes Naomi's advice. She went back to Moab. She started on the journey. She began the journey, and it looks for a little while that Naomi would have two daughters-in-law returning with her. that would appear to be the case. But Naomi's bleak portrait of a hopeless future soon overcame any sense of personal loyalty to her mother-in-law, any loyalty that Arpa felt for her mother-in-law, and she turned back.

The land of covenant blessing held no attraction for this woman. Both Ruth and Arpa walked together along the same road for a while, both in apparent harmony outwardly, one with the other, but as is clear from the story, their hearts lay in different directions.

[ 34 : 24 ] They both appeared to respond in the same way to the same circumstances for a season. But while Ruth went on, Arpa turned back.

Now, some of you here this evening have made the journey from Moab to Bethlehem. to serve the living God.

God, you heard the gospel. You turned your back on the world, and you came to Jesus Christ.

But are there any present here tonight who have walked for a season on the road to return? Did you appear to offer bright hope that you too had come to trust in the God of the covenant?

But is the truth that when the prospects ahead looked hard, and the real cost of making the journey became plain, you turned back?

[ 35 : 43 ] You remember what Jesus said to the scribe who answered wisely, and Jesus said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

Within touching distance of the kingdom, but not seeing the king. And maybe you're here this evening because you love a husband or a wife or a parent or a friend who follows Jesus, and you're deeply committed to them.

You honor them, just as Orpah honored Naomi, her mother-in-law. But you know, personal loyalty, the religion of your family, the tradition of your parents is not enough to break the attraction of Moab.

Everything minus Jehovah is in Moab. Yes, it offers you a lot, but in the end, you will gain nothing but the loss of your immortal soul.

And that's the choice that Orpah, the rejectee, makes. She chooses the familiar, the temporal, and the visible. The world always looks easier than the difficult prospects that one will face when you seek a place among the people of God.

[ 37 : 20 ] But my friend, of all you have this evening, is love for tradition, love for family. But the point is this, do you have love for Jesus Christ in your life?

Because if you don't, you will certainly turn back your life will be as it is illustrated by the parable of the sword.

You remember in that illustration there was the seed that was sown in rocky soil. What was true? It immediately sprung up, but since it had no depth of soil, the sun soon scorched, and because there was no root, it withered away.

And you remember what Jesus said, you are the one. who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet because you have no root in yourself, though you endure for a while, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately you fall away.

So I would suggest that every one of us needs to search our hearts in the light of our past turning back. that we be not like us, that we be not like the rich young man who came to Jesus.

[ 38 : 46 ] You remember the question he had, and after speaking with Christ and being confronted with Christ about the cost of discipleship, he went away sorrowful because his possessions were great.

The cost for him of following the Lord Jesus Christ was just too demanding. Oh, my friend, is that how it is with you this evening?

Do you think it's too demanding to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? Is the attraction of Moab, is it too strong?

Not so it was for this woman. She was almost persuaded. The rejected and the verdict of scripture is this.

She has gone back. She has gone back to her people and to her gods. Back to her gods and her idols.

[ 39 : 56 ] You know, it's such, it's a picture that's so full of pathos. it's such a heartbreaking picture that is set before us as we watch this young woman walk back to the place that she had come out from and return to her people and to her gods.

to her gods. She's going back to her failed gods. They cannot give her the life that she needs.

Whatever gods or idols are in your life tonight, friend, they cannot give you what you must need. only Jesus Christ can give you this.

But then secondly, the reborn Ruth. If Arpa is an almost persuaded, Ruth becomes a new believer. Arpa turns back and verse 15, Naomi rounds on Ruth and tells her to the saying, look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people, to her gods, return after your sister-in-law.

[ 41 : 25 ] As if Naomi was saying to her, if you had any sense at all, you would follow her. And Ruth replies in words that are possibly among some of the most well-known words in the Old Testament.

It's a most memorable reply. Do not urge me to leave you or return from following you. Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people. Your God, my God, where you die, I will die. There I will be buried.

May the Lord do so more to me and more also. If anything but death parts me from you.

her affirmation goes above and beyond even marital vows which are unto death.

But this affirmation goes beyond that. It goes to death and to burial. your people shall be my people and your God my God.

[ 42 : 39 ] Now note the change in these words because earlier in the chapter Ruth was said along with Arpa we will return with you Naomi to your people.

And a change has occurred. Now Naomi's people are her people.

What in the world has happened to Ruth to produce this extraordinary statement and declaration of commitment when Arpa has already buckled under the pressure and turned back?

Well there's only one explanation. Ruth has been converted. She's been reborn. Ruth's tears were not just emotional they were tears of new found joy.

And yet Naomi is almost brutal in insisting that if her daughter-in-law follow her to Bethlehem Judah things are only going to go from bad to worse.

[ 43 : 49 ] And so she seems even more determined to send Ruth back to her paganism. Go back to your God she says. It is strange encouragement from a so-called believer to return.

And yet I believe this is the test that God in his wisdom is using to differentiate between the principle of sin in the life of Arpa and the principle of grace in the life of Ruth.

There is no reason to doubt that Naomi meant what she said. She is speaking more openly perhaps than she did during these last ten years as she seeks to draw attention to the cost if you like of discipleship.

they were doing that just to stir you up to further commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because despite Naomi's discouragement Ruth by her strong affirmation indicates that she has experienced a wonderful gospel change.

[ 45 : 36 ] And you see that in a number of ways. Looking at her statement notice for example that Ruth echoes the language of God's own covenant promise to Israel.

Remember God had told Israel in the book of Exodus chapter 6 I will take you as my people and I will be your God. I commit myself to you to save you and love you and keep you and protect you and redeem you.

Ruth is turning God's promise around and she declares your people shall be my people and your God my God. And do you see what she's doing? She is taking God's covenant for herself.

She is identifying with those whom God has redeemed. Your people are mine and your God my God. Remember too that Ruth has considered all of the discouragements that Naomi has put in her path.

She knows that humanly speaking there are really very few prospects of a brighter future ahead over in Judah. She's watched her sister-in-law whom she clearly loves leave for the attractions of Moab.

[ 46 : 52 ] She's lost everything with no earthly hope of recovery. And one of the only people in the world who knows exactly what it's like to go through such a painful experience has turned her back and returned.

And you know when you have people with you in life who have shared your experience there is a certain bond between you and them.

Ruth knows the way ahead could be difficult if she continues to travel from Moab to Bethlehem Judah and yet she presses on.

And the only explanation that can account for her determination to make the journey is that her heart has been changed profoundly. She has been saved by grace and by grace joined to the God of Israel whose covenant name she takes on her own lips.

This Moabite woman may the Lord do so to me and more else verse 17 if anything but death parts me from you. She takes the very name by which God has revealed himself to Israel as their deliverer and their savior.

[ 48 : 09 ] The name that signals his covenant love and faithfulness to them in remembering his promises and bringing them out of Egypt from slavery and bondage.

This God says I take to be my God his people my own people. And so she turns to Naomi I can't leave you Naomi because I cannot leave the God I love.

I cling to you Naomi because I am clinging to him. And here's one great difference between an almost persuaded and a true convert to Jesus Christ.

The almost persuaded follows on the path perhaps because of personal loyalties. In this instance because of the love of a mother-in-law who has lost everything.

When the hardships of life press in the almost persuaded finds the familiar comforts of Moab easier than the cost of living among the people of God.

[ 49 : 23 ] the new believer counts the cost clearly. The new believer knows that to follow Jesus means to take up the cross.

It's the way of dying to self and our own interests. We bring nothing to the cross but our need. Try to bring anything to contribute to your salvation and the cross becomes a stumbling block.

And this young woman is learning as Paul expresses it in the New Testament that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom.

God himself has come to capture her heart and she cannot but follow him and serve him.

Remember in the New Testament in John's Gospel chapter 6 many people after hearing Jesus teaching and you remember what is reported this is a hard saying who can understand it and as you read through that chapter you were told from that time towards the end of the chapter many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more they were almost persuaded and then the Lord Jesus turned to the twelve and he said do you also want to go away and you remember Peter the spokesman and he answered Jesus in words that would not have sounded at all strange I believe on the lips of

Ruth the Moabitess Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life to whom shall we go there is no one else to whom they can go and tonight the same Lord Jesus is asking you do you want to go away will you also turn back or like Ruth will you take me for your God and my people for your people do you recognize with Simon Peter that there's nowhere else to go you know perhaps you're up in years you have much experience of the world but has it given you what you're really looking for perhaps you were brought up in a home where you were surrounded by

[ 52 : 32 ] Christian believers and you saw the love and the bond and the joy and the fellowship that existed in the lives of those people who surrounded you and in your heart of hearts you know that there's an emptiness in your life and a void and despite all your experience of life and everything that you've tried you've never managed to fill that void and remove that emptiness out of your life but if you trust in Jesus I guarantee you that that void and emptiness will be removed you know however tempting and enticing the world may at times appear whoever hard and painful following Jesus may be there is nowhere else to go for he alone has the words of eternal life

Ruth the Moabites she's always called that whenever she appears in this little book which incidentally is not so much about Ruth it's about God but that's for another time she's always called that Ruth the Moabites or the Moabites woman it's like she can never get away from that label she's an outsider but notice wonderfully that Ruth the Moabites not Naomi raised in the land of promise to know the Lord and his sovereignty and his promises nor Arpa the other Moabite girl but Ruth the Moabites the outsider is the one who comes all the way in and embraces the good news and receives the Lord as her God and you know that's the beauty and the glory of the gospel outsiders are brought in and you know there is room this evening under the shadow of the wings of the almighty for outsiders even for

Moabites you may you may consider you but there's room for you there need be no Arpas this evening in this building tonight there's room for all to come like Ruth to take the God of Israel the God of covenant mercy for your God as he has offered to you and Christ Jesus son the reborn the rejectee finally the restored I believe that Naomi was a backslidden believer she knows the Lord that much is evident by her benediction in verse 8 may the Lord deal kindly with you and I referred already she used the word it means covenant love and mercy loving kindness the special mark of the relationship between

God and his people because God always shows chesed to his children the New Testament equivalent might be something like grace he gives grace to his people binding himself to him and they to him and that is what Naomi pronounces on her daughters in law as she seeks to send them home her constant push to turn these young women away from God and his people her outright recommendation to Ruth that the gods of Moab may in fact be her best bet it all tells the story the sorry tale of a heart and dramatic spiritual decline and if you look at verse 13 we may get some indication of what drives her spiritual condition no my daughters when the protest had been turned back for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me that's how she reads her circumstances she believes in the sovereignty of God she's perfectly orthodox on that point she had come to learn that Moab was a country of famine in comparison to the land she left behind she had wandered far from covenant promises and covenant opportunities

she experienced bitterness in her providence and you see in her wandering from God and in the process of being restored she was emptied you know restoration is very painful it's a very painful experience to be restored she was being emptied that's often how the Lord works he empties us of all the things in which we put our trust he empties us of pride and self importance where do we see pride in the life of Naomi well look how she left Bethlehem Judah look how proud she was the day we left how do we know well listen to what she says in response to the welcome of greeting extended to her is this Naomi do not call me Naomi don't call me pleasant call me Mara bitterness you know I can't help but ask myself if Naomi remembers the meaning of Mara it was a place of grumbling on the part of Israel where the Lord turned the bitter undrinkable water into sweet thirst quenching water and by doing so he demonstrates that he is the Lord he is the [ 58 : 50 ] Lord who heals one who can bring sweetness out of bitterness call me Mara bitter for the almighty has dealt very bitter with me I went away full there it is I went away full there is the pride in the statement of Naomi I went away full and the Lord has brought me home again empty and it is only by being emptied that she can enjoy the fullness of blessing again why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the almighty has brought calamity upon me she could testify to the pain of chastening and God's rod of chastening as we often used to hear way back in the past from this very pulpit hangs in the chamber of his fervent love chastening is always done out of love although the chastened will not be able to read it like that when experiencing the pain of the rod that's why the

Bible states now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present but painful nevertheless afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it I went out full says Naomi in my own strength in my own wisdom without his guidance but what is true now what is true now note the contrast between I Naomi and the Lord of great grace I went out full the Lord has brought me home again empty in other words he didn't leave me although I forsook him he didn't forsake me he brought me home better to be empty and under the guidance of the Lord than full and wandering away from God yes the process of restoration can be extremely painful but the benefits are most wonderful and I see parallels here between Naomi and the prodigal son what motivated Naomi to leave Moab was it not that there was sufficient food in the land of promise she had heard the Lord had visited his people by giving them bread what motivated the prodigal son to return how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare I perish will hunger I will arise and go to my father both emptied in order to be filled in both examples there is evidence of genuine repentance repentance that leads to life you know knowing that one is condemned does not on its own lead to repentance that requires

God's covenant mercy mercy and this instance seen in the provision of bread look at this woman now penitent in poverty empty but waiting on the God of rich provision who fills the hungry ultimately for us God's grace is seen in the giving of Jesus the bread of life so that we know that he will pardon the penitent and we are encouraged to turn to him I don't know if Naomi was asking the question why why me I don't know if she was asking that but if she was

I believe that the Lord answered the question and demonstrated to her the folly of the action that they took initially as a family when they left the land of promise turned their back on the God of covenant grace and went into the land of idolatry but if Naomi was asking the question maybe another answer for Naomi was this Ruth one word Ruth's conversion in part at least the explanation of Naomi's pain for is this not about bringing

[ 64 : 19 ] Ruth to himself and positioning her life in the ongoing unfolding of the purpose for the world God reaching through the life of Naomi to bring Ruth the Moabites to himself the rejected Yorba weeping from the turmoil of parting the reborn Ruth weeping tears of new found joy the restored Naomi tears of bitter repentance let's ask ourselves the question which one most closely resembles you this evening are you going to leave this building go back to the world back to your idols back to your gods back to

Moab or are you going to step out in faith like this woman Ruth clinging to the God of covenant grace trusting in him identifying with his people refusing any longer to be a Moabitess and character but to be a believer in character is there anyone here like Naomi did you stray from the path did something happen in your life and you stepped back oh isn't it wonderful that there is a God of infinite grace who still invites you to come who exhorts you to come and who promises restoration in your life so that you come to know the imperceptible dropping of the dew upon your life as he promised to Israel on another occasion let us pray eternal and ever blessed God the God

of covenant faithfulness the God of immense loving kindness the God who deals graciously compassionately lovingly tenderly tenderly with unworthy sinners oh Lord help us to come in our total unworthiness to cast ourselves upon the lap of divine grace and to plead the merits of a glorious risen ascended saviour the one in whom sinners find acceptance with thee and the glory shall be thine in Jesus name we ask it amen let us conclude by singing to God's praise on the sing psalms version of psalm 130 that's page 173 Lord from the depths I call to you hear me from on high give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry Lord in your presence who can stand if you our sins record but yet forgiveness is with you that we may fear you Lord I wait my soul waits for the Lord my hope is in his word more than the watchman waits for dawn my soul waits for the Lord oh Israel put your hope in God for mercy is with him and full redemption from their sins his people he'll redeem let us sing the whole song Lord from the depths Lord from the depths I call to you [ 69 : 30 ] Lord hear me from on high and give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry Lord in your presence who can stand if you our sins record forget with goodness is with you that we may feel you Lord I wait my soul waits for the Lord my hope is in his word more than the watchman waits for dawn my soul waits for the Lord O Israel put you hope in God for mercy is with him and through redemption from their sins his people will redeem now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with you all now and forever amen to happen and every possibility go has seen a over into the time again has said and that momento the theo I ■notta