

# Ruth 1

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 29 November 2015

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[ 0 : 00 ] We'll be doing a series through this short book. As you're turning there, let me give a brief introduction. You might wonder, what does the Book of Ruth have to do with Advent and Christmas?

Well, the Book of Ruth is set in a dark time, a time where ordinary people lived in fear of violent attacks, where once-stable family units broke apart, where refugees and immigrants struggled to survive in foreign lands, where cross-cultural relationships were marked by suspicion, where God's people endured their own depression and grief and loneliness and bore the burden of each other's depression and grief and loneliness.

It is a world, of course, very much like ours. But in the midst of this dark and broken world, what we see in the Book of Ruth is God's merciful intervention on behalf of three otherwise unknown individuals, an elderly, embittered widow, a young, daring immigrant, and a successful, well-respected man.

But God's provision for these three otherwise unknown individuals is part of a larger story of His provision for His people as a whole. We see God bringing life and hope to a broken family, and through this family we see God bringing life and hope to a broken people.

The first words of the book, Ruth chapter 1 verse 1, are in the days when the judges ruled. The last word of the book is David. So what we see is through Naomi and Ruth and Boaz, these three people, God was establishing His kingdom in Israel.

[ 1 : 42 ] And as we look back on the story from 3,000 years later, we see that God was also preparing the way for Jesus the Messiah because Ruth and Boaz were ancestors not just of King David, but ultimately of King Jesus.

And so we've entitled this Advent sermon series, Prelude to the King. Now to help you get the most out of this series, I want to recommend a book by Paul Miller called *A Loving Life in a World of Broken Relationships*.

It's based on the book of Ruth. It has 23 short chapters, sort of reflections and meditations on the book of Ruth, walking slowly through it.

So it's a great Advent devotional or sermon series companion. There are some copies on the back table. There are some copies on the book stall. If you order it on Amazon, you have to pay \$8, but you can get it here for \$5.

And I think if you read it over the next few weeks, I think it can help you keep focused on what's really important in the midst of a season of the year that can easily become busy and distracting and stressful.

[ 2 : 57 ] So it's also available if you want it on Kindle or ebook or MP3. You can go online and buy it there. But it's called *A Loving Life* by Paul Miller. Anyway, so I highly recommend that.

And you can pick one up afterwards if you're interested. All right, Ruth chapter 1. We are reading the whole chapter today. So let us read together. Ruth 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, and the name of his wife, Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion. 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. These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Kilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[ 4 : 01 ] Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go return, each of you, to her mother's house.

May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept, and they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters.

Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown?

[ 5 : 07 ] Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law.

But Ruth clung to her. And she said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law.

But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go. And where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also, if anything but death parts me from you.

And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said, No more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

[ 6 : 17 ] And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara.

For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full and the Lord has brought me back, empty.

Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? So Naomi returned.

And Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

The book of Ruth begins in a dark time. In the days when the judges ruled, if you turn back one page to the end of the book of Judges, the last verse says, In those days, there was no king in Israel.

[ 7 : 22 ] Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And the last five chapters of Judges describe a time of political and moral chaos.

Chapter 17 begins with a young man who stole money from his mother and hired a superstitious priest who is motivated purely by financial gain.

Chapter 18 describes violent gangs who preyed on unsuspecting people. Chapter 19 describes the brutal beating, rape, and murder of an innocent woman resulting in a brutal civil war, chapters 20 and 21.

It was a dark time in Israel. The leaders were corrupt or non-existent. The nation was literally being torn apart. And so we come to the book of Ruth in the days when the judges ruled.

There was a famine in the land. Now when the people of Israel prepared to enter the land of Canaan, God made promises to them that if they would obey his commands, he would bless them with fruitfulness and prosperity.

[ 8 : 33 ] But if they rejected his commands and persisted in unfaithfulness, God warned. Leviticus 26, I will make the heavens like iron and the earth like bronze.

And your strength shall be spent in vain for the land shall not yield its increase. And the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. You see, the famine was merely an outward sign that all was not well among the people of God.

Ironically, the famine struck Bethlehem in particular. Some of the names in Ruth, we'll see as we go along, are important. Bethlehem means house of bread. It was a dark time in Israel when the house of bread had no bread.

And what we see in verses 1 through 5 is it was also a dark time for Naomi and her family. Because of the famine, Elimelech and his family left the promised land for Moab.

The Moabites were Israel's pagan neighbors to the southeast. When the Israelites had tried to pass through Moab on their way to the promised land, the Moabite king opposed them, bribed Balaam to prophesy against them.

[ 9 : 43 ] When that didn't work, the women of Moab seduced many of the Israelite men. There was bad blood between Israel and Moab. And it sounds like not good news when the people of Israel are forced to take refuge in Moab in order to survive.

But Elimelech's family didn't just sojourn in Moab. For a short time, it says, verse 2, they remained there. Verse 4, they lived there about 10 years.

We see a similar pattern as back in Genesis with Abraham's nephew Lot. He first moved his tent near Sodom and Gomorrah, but pretty soon was dwelling in Sodom.

And what we see here in this chapter is the people of God gradually losing their distinctive identity in the world, blending into the surrounding pagan world.

Elimelech's name means my God is king. His son's names, Malon and Kilion, mean weak and frail. And what we see is that they assimilated not just to the Moabite culture, which would have been fine, but also to Moabite religion.

[ 10 : 56 ] The two sons took Moabite wives, verse 4, who presumably continued worshipping Moabite gods. Naomi didn't seem to care very much about that.

Verse 15, Naomi makes an offhand comment. She says, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods. Now, like many offhand comments, it reveals some of where Naomi's heart was.

And Naomi's heart was basically, well, she has her Moabite gods, I have my Israelite god, it's not really a big deal. Religion is mostly a function of culture and ethnicity, and she doesn't really care that much about it.

So they leave the promised land, they begin to lose their distinctive identity as God's people in Moab, and finally the family literally starts dying off. First, Elimelech, my God is king, died.

Then the two sons die, both of them childless. Naomi is now extremely vulnerable because in the ancient world, a woman's identity depended on her connection to a man and her legacy depended on the children that she bore.

[ 12 : 11 ] But for Naomi, she now had neither of those. She had no man to protect and provide for her, no child or grandchild to give her hope for a bright future.

In the eyes of the world she lived in, and in her own eyes, Naomi had nothing. No security, no identity, no future, and no hope.

Naomi was dying. Her life, her family, was falling apart just like the nation of Israel. Now maybe you can identify with Naomi in some way or another.

Maybe you've come here from a foreign land. You feel misunderstood or ignored. Maybe it seems like no one will ever hire you for a decent job and you feel powerless.

Maybe you're homeless and you cry yourself to sleep at night. Maybe you're married but it's not a happy marriage and the problems only seem to get worse. Maybe like Naomi, you're a widow or a widower and you feel an empty hole as you lay alone in bed every night.

[ 13 : 21 ] Maybe you've lost a spouse because they cheated on you or divorced you or abandoned you. Maybe you've always wanted to have kids but you're infertile or you haven't found a suitable person to marry.

Maybe you've lost not just a spouse but a child. And it seems like the darkness haunts you and won't ever leave. It feels like nothing will ever really change.

If that is you in one way or another, I pray that God will speak to you through this passage and through this book. If that's not you, if you're successful and secure, well-respected and well-off, there is also a message for you, particularly in the character of Boaz who we'll meet next week in chapter 2.

But today I want to focus in on Naomi whose journey to Moab and back is the main storyline of chapter 1. And in today's passage, what we see, we see two ways that God extends his steadfast love toward us when our lives are falling apart.

The first thing that we see is that God's kindness leads us to repentance. Verse 6, we see the first ray of hope for Naomi.

[14:42] She heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. The famine was over. Once more, there was bread in Bethlehem.

And somehow, the good news of the Lord's undeserved kindness to his people found its way to her all the way in the far country of Moab. In the book of Ruth, there are only two verses that speak explicitly about God's action.

One here at the beginning, another at the end. Here it says, the Lord visited his people and gave them food. Chapter 4, verse 13, it says, the Lord gave Ruth conception and she bore a son. And in both cases, what we see is the Lord provided in ways that no one could see at first. The seed began to grow below the ground.

A child began to develop within the womb. The end result would be obvious, but the beginnings were hidden. Jesus said, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

[15:51] The smallest of all seeds. You'd hardly even notice it. But when it's planted, it becomes the largest of all garden plants and the birds of the air take refuge in its branches.

The point is, God often works in ways that are initially hidden from us. He works behind the scenes and within the hearts of women and men, often when we least expect it.

The book of Ruth contains no dramatic miracles, no dreams or visions, no prophetic words. The main characters are two ordinary women who have no political authority, no military power, no economic leverage, no social prominence.

Widows were some of the most powerless and disenfranchised people in the ancient world. And yet we see the Lord particularly caring for Naomi and somehow ensuring that even far away in the fields of Moab, she heard the news of the Lord's merciful provision for his people back home.

And Naomi's response when she heard this news was to return. Now this word return, I don't know if you noticed it, it's the key verb in this chapter.

[17:09] It appears 12 times. Verse 6, she arose to return. Verse 7, they went on the way to return. Verse 8, Naomi says, go return.

They say, no, we will return with you. Verse 11 and 12, turn back, same Hebrew word. Verse 15, return with her. Verse 16, Ruth says, don't urge me to return. Verse 21, the Lord has brought me back, same word.

The Lord has returned me. And verse 22, so Naomi returned. Now you might wonder, why does the author use this verb so often? Right?

You could tell the story without repeating the verbs 12 times. But the same verb is used throughout the Bible, especially in the prophets to speak of repentance. We read earlier, Isaiah 30, in returning and rest you shall be saved.

In quietness and trust shall be your strength. Or Hosea 14, 1, return Israel to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

[18:13] If you consider the Bible as a whole, it's one big story of exile and return. In the very beginning of the Bible, God placed his people in a garden of his provision, in a temple of his presence.

But people rebelled against his authority and distrusted his goodness and so they were exiled. They were sent away from that garden. They became wanderers in the wilderness, condemned to die.

The very same pattern happened with the people of Israel. God brought them into the land of Canaan, a land of his provision, with a temple of his presence.

But they rebelled against his authority and distrusted his goodness. The land was defiled and eventually they were sent into exile far away. Jesus told a famous parable that tells the same story. There was a man who had two sons. The younger son demanded his inheritance from his father, left home, journeyed into a far country, squandered his property there in reckless living and found himself destitute, lonely, and hungry.

[19:28] You see, according to the Bible, this is our human condition. We have all rebelled against God's authority and distrusted his goodness and the result is we find ourselves far from our true home, spiritually empty, profoundly alone.

You see, by settling and staying in the land of Moab, Naomi had distanced herself from the Lord's people and from the Lord's provision. And in his kindness, the Lord was calling Naomi to return home, to come back to the Lord and come back to his people.

Now you might say, well, well, wait a minute. I mean, how can you fault Naomi for leaving in the midst of a famine? I mean, she was only going along with her husband and providing for her

children.

I mean, and how can you fault her for staying there while there was still a famine going on? Well, fair enough. I think Naomi's family was bearing some of the consequences of the spiritual degeneration of their community as a whole, of Israel as a whole.

But you know, when Naomi comes back in verse 21, Naomi makes no excuses. She says, I went away and the Lord has brought me back.

[ 20 : 50 ] You see, it's the kindness of the Lord that brings us to repentance, to return home to him. It's his merciful intervention that brings us home to his presence and to his people.

In Jesus' parable, why does the younger son return home? It's because far off in the pig pen where he's hungry and alone, he remembers the kindness of his father.

He says, even my father's hired servants have plenty of food to eat. And so he arose and started the long journey home. maybe like Naomi or like the prodigal son, you've lived far away from God or from the church for a long time.

Maybe you left the church in a time of famine, in a time of spiritual dryness, in a time when the church didn't live up to what it should. Maybe your life has come crashing down around you and now you're alone, vulnerable, desperate, abandoned.

You feel like you have no future and no hope. But can you see God's kindness extended to you even through ordinary circumstances of life, a meal paid for by a stranger, unexpected good news from far away or perhaps one dependable person who sticks with you through thick and thin when everyone else seems to have scattered.

[ 22 : 31 ] The Lord in his kindness is calling you to return, to repent, to come back home to him and to his people. Leave your idols behind, leave your life in Moab behind.

Come back home to Jesus and to his church. What we see is Naomi was willing to leave behind everything and everyone that she had grown close to in the land of Moab.

She had lost her husband and two sons but she still had her Moabite daughters-in-law and it's clear that they had developed a close emotional bond.

Even after their husband's death, her daughters-in-law continued living with her. That was a bit unusual. But in verses eight and nine, we see that Naomi considered their future more highly than her own.

She sent them off with a generous blessing and prepared to set out on the long journey to Bethlehem alone. Imagine in those days an elderly widow setting out on a seven to ten day journey which required crossing a national border, fording a major river, climbing over two thousand feet elevation in order to reach her hometown up in the hills, Bethlehem.

[ 23 : 57 ] She had only made this journey once before in her life. It was a great risk to travel such a distance alone. In verse ten, they both said, no, we will return with you to your people.

They lifted up their voice and wept twice, verse nine, verse fourteen, but Naomi insisted, verse eleven through thirteen, she said, I want you two to leave, I want you two to have what I will never have.

I want you two to have freedom. I want you two to have security. I want you two to have a happy marriage. And hope for the future. If you come with me, you will share in my grief and my loneliness and my poverty for the rest of my life.

But if I let you go, you will have a bright future. So go. Naomi was willing to let go of everything and everyone that she had known in Moab to embrace a bitter present and an uncertain future.

But she was determined to return home. God's kindness led Naomi to repentance. To leave behind her life in Moab and return home to the Lord's people.

[ 25 : 20 ] Now you might ask, what about Naomi's bitter complaints? If Naomi is returning home to the Lord and his people, what? verse 13, it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

It could also be translated, it is more bitter for me than for you that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Verse 20, she says, don't call me Naomi, don't call me pleasant or lovely, call me bitter.

I mean, imagine someone walking into church that you recognize from 10 years ago and they say, don't call me pleasant, call me bitter because the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me.

I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me pleasant? When the Lord has testified against me, the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.

Some people have defended Naomi's complaint. After all, she had lost her husband and two sons. She wasn't complaining about something trivial or petty.

[ 26 : 35 ] And Naomi rightly recognized that all things come through the sovereign hand of God and nothing happens merely by chance. One person said, by holding Yahweh responsible for her losses, Naomi affirmed the Lord's participation in the events.

Thus, despite appearances, things were not out of control. If he is at least involved, Yahweh, the Lord, might very well straighten things out. Bitter complaint cloaked firm faith.

Now, other people have criticized Naomi's complaint. She does indeed affirm that God is sovereign, but she certainly doesn't rest content in that truth. Verse, Naomi's grieving is also twisted by self-pity and self-centeredness.

Verse 21, she says, I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. She completely ignores and disregards her loyal daughter-in-law who has sacrificed everything to come with her. She acts like Ruth doesn't even exist. Now, it's important to realize that Naomi returns home to the Lord and to his people with bitterness, with self-pity.

[ 27 : 59 ] Because in his kindness, the Lord calls us to return to him as we are. He doesn't say, clean yourself up and then come home to me.

When the prodigal son came home, he stunk. He was dirty. He was not well-dressed. He was not used to living in his father's house, having been gone for so long.

If a shepherd goes and finds a lost sheep that has been stuck in a thicket of thorn bushes, that sheep is going to be pretty prickly until the thorns get combed out.

And that may take some time. And Jesus, the good shepherd, doesn't say, stop being so prickly. He says, come to me and I will give you rest. The content of Naomi's complaint is mixed.

There's honesty, there's bitterness, there's recognition of God's sovereignty, there's a discontentment with it. What do we take from that?

[ 29 : 07 ] God's love? Let me speak to you for a minute if you've experienced bitter loss. The Bible makes room for bitter complaint.

Read many of the Psalms, or the book of Lamentations, or the prophet Jeremiah. How long, O Lord, how long? Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me, and darkness is my only companion. For some of us, these words make us uncomfortable.

If someone comes into church talking like Naomi, we want to get out of the conversation. Or we respond with advice.

Well, what can you do differently from now on? Well, you got yourself into this in the first place. Or explanations. Well, every cloud has a silver lining.

[ 30 : 14 ] Sometimes advice and explanations are not helpful, especially in the moment. That's what got Job's friends in trouble. Now, the bitter complaints in the Bible are not the last word.

The Psalms as a whole take us on a journey from bitter complaint to joyful praise. Lamentations is full of complaint and confession of sin, but smack in the middle is a resounding declaration of God's faithfulness.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. But, you know, sometimes you need to go through bitter complaint in order to arrive at joyful praise.

And sometimes we need to make space for each other to grieve bitterly before God as a necessary step on the way to praising God with freedom and joy.

In the storyline of Ruth, God hears and responds to Naomi's complaint in three ways. First, Ruth and Orpah weep with her.

[ 31 : 32 ] That's verse 14. When she first says how bitter she is. And that is a Christian response to weep with those who weep.

Second, God sends Ruth to love Naomi with steadfast and sacrificial love. And as we'll see, that's what actually begins to transform Naomi.

From a bitter, self-pitying person into a joyful and thankful person. And third, at the end of the book, chapter 4, verse 15, Naomi receives a gentle rebuke.

The women of Bethlehem say, your daughter-in-law who loves you is worth more to you than seven sons. They try to reorient her perspective.

Say, you haven't realized that there's someone right beside you who's been very loyal to you. Grieving people sometimes need rebuke, just like the rest of us.

[ 32 : 43 ] But in Ruth, at least, it goes from weeping to loving and later on rebuking. That's the first thing we see, that God's kindness leads us to repentance, to return home to God and his people.

That's the first way God extends his steadfast love toward us when our lives are falling apart. His kindness leads us to repentance. But second, God's steadfast love doesn't leave us alone.

In his mercy, the Lord provided a loyal companion for Naomi, who would be a living demonstration of his promise to never leave her and never forsake her.

Now, we've seen Naomi considered Orpah and Ruth's future more highly than her own. She was willing to let them go. She was willing to embrace a bitter present and an uncertain future on her own so that they could enjoy a bright future and hope and flourishing.

Naomi was willing to let go of everything and everyone that she had known in the land of Moab. But what we see here in Ruth, verse 16 to the end, is that Ruth's love and loyalty to Naomi and to the Lord surpassed even Naomi's love and loyalty to Ruth.

[ 34 : 16 ] Now, if you look at the dialogue, starting at verse 8 and going to verse 17, the way it unfolds shows how unusual Ruth's response is, right?

First, Naomi blesses her daughters-in-law and send them off. And they say, oh no, we'll come with you. And then Naomi says, you have absolutely no future prospects with me.

Then we see Orpah turn back. Orpah does the sensible, reasonable, expected thing. She stays in the same place where she's lived all her life with the people she's known who speak her language where she will almost certainly find another husband.

Naomi says, follow her example. And this back and forth and back and forth leads to the climax of this chapter, verse 16 and verse 17, where Ruth says this, do not urge me to leave you or 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.

[ 35 : 31 ] May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you. Ruth makes it very clear. She says, I'm not just coming with you for the ride to make sure you get home safely.

I'm not clinging on to you because it's mutually beneficial to both of us. I will join your people and I will worship your God.

I will not only stay there for the rest of your life, I will stay there for the rest of my life. That's where I'll be buried. And I am making a solemn oath, a promise before Yahweh, the God of Israel, the Lord of heaven and earth.

I won't leave you because I won't leave him. Ruth's statement has five parts. In the ESV, in the Bibles, in the pews, it's five sentences.

And the central statement is your people shall be my people and your God my God. That's the heart of Ruth's promise to Naomi.

[ 36 : 39 ] It's not just about Ruth's love for Naomi and her care and concern for her. It's about Ruth declaring her loyalty to the Lord and to his people even at the cost of leaving everything else behind.

See, Ruth's love and loyalty to Naomi and to the Lord surpassed even Naomi's love and loyalty toward Ruth. Let me give you three contrasts.

Naomi was willing to let go of everything she had known for the last ten years in Moab in order to return home to where she had grown up. Ruth was willing to let go of everything she had known for her whole life in order to go to a land where she had never lived.

Like Abraham. Ruth left behind her homeland and her pagan religious background in order to be loyal to the God of the Bible. Now, unlike Abraham, as far as we know, Ruth had received no specific promises for her personal future.

Ruth had received no personal word from God. She had no spouse to accompany her, no army to defend her, no possessions to support her. And yet Ruth went.

[ 38 : 11 ] Because she had heard about the Lord and his promises and his kindness. And how he had promised through this people, through the nation of Israel to bless every nation on earth.

One day. And she said, I will give up everything to be part of that people. To be included in that promise.

Jesus said to his disciples, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. But Jesus also promised, truly I say to you, there was no one who has left behind house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.

Jesus says in order to follow him we have to be willing to give up everything without holding anything back. And yet he promises us that in the end God will never be in anyone's debt. That God will repay us far more than we can ever give to him. In his mercy and in his generous love. Ruth let go of everything she had known to go to a foreign land and yet, interestingly, in a sense, she was arriving at her true home.

[ 39 : 46 ] Verse 22 says, Naomi returned and Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. You might read that and think, but Ruth has never been to Bethlehem.

How can she be returning there? But she's coming to her true home. She's coming to the Lord and to his people, to the place where she's meant to be all along.

So that's the first thing. Ruth left everything to go to a foreign land for the sake of God and his promises. Second contrast between Ruth and Naomi.

Naomi was an elderly woman with no foreseeable prospect of marriage or posterity anywhere. She was willing to live the rest of her life on her own, in her loneliness, in her poverty, so that Ruth and Orpah could enjoy marriage and a bright future in Moab.

Now, Ruth, as a young woman with great prospects for a bright future in Moab, who chose to give up those very real prospects in order to devote herself to caring and providing for an old woman in a place where she had no prospects of marriage and family.

[ 41 : 09 ] Ruth is one of the few examples of people in the Old Testament voluntarily embracing the likely prospect of singleness long-term, without sex, without marriage, without children, for the sake of obedience to the Lord and service to his people.

The Apostle Paul would later say singleness is a gift and it's a call to undivided devotion to the Lord. Jesus himself said some have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Now, the social dynamics are different today, but some of you may be called to embrace the likely prospect of singleness, either for a long time or perhaps even for your whole life.

For the sake of obedience to Jesus and devoting yourself to his kingdom purposes in the world. That's the second contrast.

Naomi sacrificed a bright future. Ruth sacrificed a bright future and marriage to care for a dying widow. Third, Naomi sent off her daughters-in-law with a blessing.

[ 42 : 28 ] And in return, she received multiple public displays of affection and expressions of love. Ruth pronounced her unswerving loyalty to Naomi.

And what did she receive in return? Only silence. Verse 18. And when she arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem, Naomi acted as if Ruth did not even exist.

Have you ever made costly sacrifices for someone and they didn't even say thank you? This is what happened to Ruth.

And she didn't become resentful. She didn't give up and return back to Moab. She persevered in her steady, devoted, unswerving loyalty to Naomi.

Ruth left everything she had known to go to a foreign land. She sacrificed a future of marriage and family to care for a dying widow. She did it with no thanks.

[ 43 : 38 ] No recognition. At least not yet. In the midst of Naomi's darkness, God sent Ruth. When Naomi's life had almost completely fallen apart, God sent Ruth to be a living demonstration of his steadfast, enduring love.

God's kindness leads us to repentance. God's steadfast love doesn't leave us alone. Perhaps God has sent someone into your life as a living reminder, a living demonstration of his steadfast love in the midst of your darkness and brokenness.

To be a living reminder that he has not left you alone. But the message we proclaim in the season of Advent is that God's steadfast love has not left us alone.

Ruth left her homeland in Moab. Jesus left his glory in heaven. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus came to us, took on our frail humanity, lived his whole entire life among us. It says he came to his own and his own to not receive him.

[ 45 : 20 ] He came to us in our bitterness, in our self-pity, and he loved us with steadfast, sacrificial, unfailing love.

And even death could not destroy his love. First John says this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus Christ is like the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son. Except he's a very different elder brother. The elder brother in that story stays home and is angry and is just as far away from the father as the younger one.

But Jesus Christ is the elder brother who left his home and came to find us in the midst of the far country and show us his kindness and bring us home to the father with him.

And so after his resurrection, Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, Jesus said, go tell my brothers, I'm ascending to my father and your father. To my God and your God.

[ 46 : 36 ] Ruth said to Naomi, your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Jesus Christ says to us, because of what I have done for you, my father is now your father.

My God is now your God. Lord, because I live, you also shall live. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you that in the midst of the darkest seasons of our lives, in the midst of our brokenness, and in the midst of our sin, our rebellion against you, that you have come to find us.

To bring us the good news of your kindness and faithfulness to bring us home to you.

We thank you that you receive us along with our bitter complaints, along with our unresolved issues. we thank you that you love us.

[ 48 : 09 ] We thank you that you love us with a steadfast, undying, unfailing, relentless love. Lord, we pray that you would fill our hearts, you would fill the empty places in our hearts with your steadfast and unfailing love, with your loyal companionship.

Lord, we pray that you would bring us back home to you, and we pray that we would know that you have not left us alone. And we pray that we would be your people in this world who reflect your steadfast love.

So that others might see who you are, what kind of a God you are. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.