

Restored

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[0 : 01] Tonight I want to begin our study of Restored by sharing a little of my personal story. I've been a follower of Jesus for about a year, not quite a year, I guess.

! And in that moment, as I prayed, I just prayed a simple prayer, but honestly, I think it was one of the most sacred moments in my life with the Lord.

And the prayer was, God, please heal my broken heart. Now, what's ironic about that is that I didn't know I had a broken heart. I didn't know that I had brokenness in my life.

I was a new Christian. I didn't have a very well-formed theology of suffering, and I didn't understand what brokenness looked like in our life. And so when I prayed that prayer, God, please heal my brokenness, it wasn't because I thought I was broken.

In fact, if you had looked at me, and as I would have looked at my life, I would have said, you know, I kind of have my act together. I had a lot of good things in my life. I was doing well in my career. I had lots of friends.

[1 : 27] I had my family. And so there wasn't anything that was obvious to me at that point that I was broken. However, I have prayed that prayer multiple times over the years with the Lord.

And I really wish that you had known me back then. Because if you could have known me back then, you would see just how amazing God is and how committed He is to restoring not just our spiritual life, but every part of our life.

Since then, I have had the opportunity for more than 20 years to pastor and to shepherd women. And so I've walked with a lot of women through life. And based on my own experience and based on the time of walking with women, I can say this without any hesitation.

The greatest disservice that a Christian woman can do to herself is to pretend that she's not broken. Let me say that again. See, none of us are exempt from brokenness.

But the good news of the gospel is that God delights in restoring broken things. Our souls, our relationships, our purpose, our identity, our God-given humanity.

[2 : 46] He does this in His own time and in His own way as we learn to live our lives more and more from the reference point of God's story. God wants us to understand the gospel story as a restoration story.

Where He restores all things that have been broken through the fall of humanity. In Scripture, we learn that God's plan of restoration began before Genesis 1-1 and before the fall in Genesis 3.

We are told that God determined two things before the world was created. First, He determined Christ's sacrificial death as the Lamb of God, that Christ would die for us.

And second, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without fault in His eyes. From these verses, we see God's plan has always been to restore broken, sinful humanity.

Through Christ, God saves us. And gives us His righteousness. We are fully accepted by God and fully acceptable to God. Therefore, we never have to worry that God is looking at us with eyes of judgment.

[3 : 54] Or that He's ever surprised or disappointed by our brokenness. Instead, He is committed to restoring our lives. And He does that as we walk in relationship with Him.

Well, starting in the Old Testament, restoration takes on... It was primarily seen in the context of Israel's story. We see they are delivered out of Egypt, go into the Promised Land.

Once they're in the Promised Land, of course, they begin to worship the pagan gods of the nations that surround them. And God had told them ahead of time, if you turn away from me and worship other gods, I will bring judgment.

Which is exactly what He does. He sends Judah into exile. They're there for 70 years or longer. And then they return from exile. And you see the restoration process begins.

So they return from exile. They rebuild Jerusalem. And they renew their covenant relationship with God. When we get to the New Testament, restoration takes on a more personal and spiritual dimension through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 02] His ministry is often described as one of restoration as He heals the sick. He raises the dead. He forgives sins. And He brings individuals back into a right relationship with God.

The apostolic writers continue to emphasize restoration within the context of the church and in the individual believer as we are being conformed to the image of Christ.

They point to the ultimate restoration at the end of the age when Christ returns for His people.

God's plan will be fulfilled. The renewal of all creation and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom where sin, death, and suffering are no longer part of our reality.

Full restoration with God has been His plan all along. And as we saw last week through the redemption of Christ, we are bought back and released to a new life in God through Jesus.

When Christ saves us, He begins to restore our brokenness. Restoration actually refers to the act of returning something to its original state, but better than what it was before.

[6 : 12] It is reclaiming what was broken or what was lost and restoring what has been broken. Our relationship with God, broken. Our lives, broken.

Our relationship with other people, broken. And our relationship with creation, broken. So no matter where we are today, we can be assured that however God is working, and whatever He is doing in your life or in my life today is part of His plan of restoration.

He promises us in 2 Corinthians 5-7 that if anyone is in Christ, she is a new creation. The old is gone, has passed away, and behold, the new has come. So in Christ, we know everything has changed.

There has been a clean break with the old. But you may think, well, how is this possible? I still struggle with sin. The point isn't that the old man is gone.

The point is the new man or the new person, which previously did not exist, now exists. And that is who we are now. Because we are in Christ, we begin to be different than we were before.

[7 : 18] Well, God also tells us in Romans 8-28 that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

So no matter what has happened, what is happening, or what will happen in our lives, those all things are tools in the hand of God who is committed to fulfilling His purpose, which is to make us like Jesus.

And you may be thinking, Pamela, if you only knew me, that you would know that I am nothing like Jesus, my answer to you is, I do know you. I am you. And yet, I am confident that God will make good on His promise.

He tells us this in Philippians 1-6, being confident in this very thing, that He who began the good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

Well, thankfully, God does not wait to begin that work. He starts the work of restoration immediately, and He promises that if there's anything that's left undone when Christ returns, it will be finished.

[8 : 26] Why? Why does He do this? Because God delights in restoring broken things, our souls, our relationships, our purpose, our identity, and our God-given humanity.

From our perspective, God's process of restoration is called our journey of faith. And while God could immediately heal and restore our broken lives, and there may be places in your life where He did immediately restore you, but for the most part, the pattern throughout the Scripture is that of a journey of walking with God, or as Paul says, it's where we are being transformed from glory to glory.

Our faith journey is story after story and experience after experience of you and me as God's people being restored as we walk with Him in a relationship.

So tonight, we want to look at Naomi's story in the Old Testament because it is a story of her walk with God and how He restored her life. So if you have your Bibles, open up to Ruth 1, and we're going to read verses 1 through 5.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

[9 : 47] 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 and 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 one was Orpah, 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.

Well, with the fall, evil skewed the way that we understand life by shifting the primary reference point from God to ourselves. And probably one of the most evident places that we see this in Scripture is in the book of Judges and even here in Ruth.

Because the time of the Judges, if you've read that book, then you know it is described as a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And so we read here that there's a famine in Bethlehem.

Now, that tells us, because this is the period of the Judges, that tells us that Israel is under God's judgment. So apparently they have once again turned away from God, worshiping the false gods.

[11 : 03] God sends a natural disaster, a famine, to get their attention, to bring them back to repentance so that they can be restored to a right relationship with Him. Because there was a famine in the land and there was no food, Naomi's husband chooses to move from Israel to Moab, where food was available.

You know, on the one hand, I want to say, let's give him a little bit of a break. He is trying to provide for his family. But the problem is, he is not seeking God and trying to provide for his family.

So nowhere do we find him asking God what to do. And because it is the time of the Judges, he defaults to what everyone else is doing. He does what he thinks is best. The result of living life on their own terms is loss, death, and an empty life.

Naomi is forced to face the reality of the fall in her own story through her own brokenness. But that is God's mercy. God's mercy in our lives is the ability for us to see our brokenness.

Without Him opening our eyes and without His grace, we are faint-hearted and unwilling to look at the broken areas of our lives. Instead, we would prefer to pretend or to stick our head in the sand.

[12 : 18] We would prefer to get busy so we don't have to think about it. We do things for God rather than focusing on being with God. And we refuse to let God show us what we need to see until life happens.

And in the midst of hardship or struggle or difficulty or life falling apart, we begin to look up rather than looking inward or looking around.

For Naomi, life happened in Moab. Naomi's husband and her two sons died, leaving her and her two daughters-in-law as destitute widows.

But God delights in restoring broken things and broken people, and we see His restoring hand of grace. We're told in verse 6 of chapter 1 that Naomi is in the fields of Moab.

She's likely there trying to glean to get food, but she's in this field in Moab when she hears a report. And the report is that the Lord has visited His people in Bethlehem and given them food.

[13 : 28] So Naomi makes the decision that she's going to return to Bethlehem along with Orpah and Ruth. But once they start out on the journey, it seems that Naomi realizes that two Moabite women being welcomed into an Israelite community and finding husbands is highly unlikely.

And once again, we see her default to doing what is right in her own eyes. She tells them to return to their families and to their gods so that they can find husbands.

Well, to Orpah, this sounds reasonable, and it makes sense. So she does what Naomi says, and she goes back to Moab. But Ruth refuses to go, saying in verses 16 to 17 of chapter 1, And for the second time, we see the restoring grace of God when Ruth refuses to leave Naomi and accompanies her to Bethlehem, completely aware that she may never marry because she is a Moabitess.

And yet, Ruth is willing to trust God, even when Naomi isn't or couldn't. When Naomi arrives in Bethlehem, life has beaten her down.

And it's her fractured relationship with God that Naomi attributes as the cause of the problem. In verses 19 through 21, we read, What we see is interstitial.

[15 : 43] Well, rather than being offended by Naomi and her accusations, again, we see the restoring grace of God in our life.

Because where sin increase, grace abound all the more. He gives her grace to be honest, to be raw, to lament.

When she tells those women not to call her Naomi anymore, to call her Mara, and explains how life has happened to her, there is no hiding there.

There is no hiding there. She is raw, honest, even if she is bitter. She recognizes God's hand in her suffering, and she's able to communicate that.

And while Naomi feels that God is against her, the larger narrative shows God's mysterious providence. He will use that very hardship to set the stage for his greater plan, and that will lead to the future Messiah, and one that will actually result in Naomi's own restoration.

[17:10] Naomi's honesty, though bitter, brings her back to God, demonstrating that even in deep despair, turning toward God rather than away is crucial. Because her deepest need was for a restored relationship with her Redeemer, not just food.

We learn from her story that God can handle honesty. He can handle our rawness and our bitterness. I always say it this way, He has big shoulders, so bring it on.

Be honest. Talk with the Lord about your brokenness. Talk with the Lord about your hurt. Even if you're mad at Him, tell Him about it. We also learn from Naomi that God uses her deepest despair in those places of brokenness to accomplish restoration and to fulfill His ultimate plan.

So in Ruth 1, Naomi recognizes God's hand in her suffering. But in the rest of the book, we see that she recognizes God's hand as He works in and through Ruth to bring redemption and blessing.

Once they are in Bethlehem, Ruth realizes that she and Naomi have to survive. And to survive, that would mean she has to go out to the fields to glean to get food.

[18:29] So she goes out one morning, and she happens to end up in the field of a man named Boaz, who looks upon Ruth with favor. He's heard about Ruth. He's heard about the way that she's cared for Naomi.

He also knows her story that her husband has passed as well. But rather than seeing her just as a Moabitess, as many probably did, he sees her as someone who puts Naomi's needs first and someone who's seeking refuge in God.

So he tells her to keep gleaning in his field, which is his way of offering her protection. In fact, he provides food for her. He provides water for her to give her comfort.

And before she leaves that very first day, he sends her home to Naomi with this ample provision of barley so that they'll be able to survive for a while. It wasn't a long-term solution, yet it was surprising enough that Naomi was curious.

When she saw how much Ruth brought home with her, she wanted to know where Ruth had gleaned. And when Ruth tells her that the man was Boaz, she recognizes him as a potential kinsman redeemer, someone who offers not just a temporary solution, but hope for a future as one who can restore her family and her land.

[19:50] Restoring grace is evident once again. God has led Ruth to the field of the man who might be the solution to their desperate need. However, as the story continues and the barley harvest comes to an end, Naomi recognizes that Boaz, while helpful in providing temporary support, was not stepping up as a kinsman redeemer.

And in chapter 3, which is my personal favorite chapter of Ruth, for the first time since arriving in Bethlehem, we get to see Naomi coming back to life.

And the reason that we know that's happening is because she is thinking about someone other than herself. So she comes up with this scheme of how to get Ruth a husband and a kinsman redeemer who will restore the land and the family that she's lost.

So Naomi instructs Ruth to approach Boaz in the dead of night at the threshing floor. Now he would have been at the threshing floor harvesting the grain.

And because they were working there for a long time, they would sleep at the threshing floor. It was not a place for a woman. But Naomi tells Ruth to go and that when she gets there in the middle of the night, he is going to be sleeping.

[21:09] And to go lay down at his feet, to take the blanket or the robe or whatever it is that's covering him, remove it, take it off of his feet so that he'll wake up in the middle of the night because he's cold.

And I personally think that she was willing to put Ruth in that situation because Boaz had a reputation of being a man with character.

We don't know. They didn't know how things would end up. But the likelihood of Boaz treating Ruth as he has already treated her is pretty heavy.

It's pretty high. And so Ruth listens to Naomi and she does exactly what she told her to do. And sure enough, Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night to find a woman lying at his feet.

And startling, he asks her who she is, to which she replies, I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer. Now in that moment, Boaz fully understood that Ruth was asking him to marry her and to redeem Naomi's land and family.

[22 : 17] However, there is a closer relative who can be a kinsman redeemer. By law, he has to be given option to redeem the land and to marry Ruth first.

So Boaz explains that to her and then he tells her to return to Naomi and let him deal with the situation, which he does that very day. He goes to the gate where he can meet with the elders and with this other kinsman redeemer.

And when he sees the man, he makes an offer. He says, you know, Elimelech's land is able to be redeemed. Would you like to redeem it? And we don't know the name of the man, so I always call him Mr. So-and-so.

So Mr. So-and-so says, yes, he will redeem the land. He wants to take the land and add it to his property. But Boaz is very crafty because then he points out, well, if you take the land, then that means you also need to marry Ruth.

And this man, Mr. So-and-so, sees her as a threat to his own security, not a blessing. So he passes the right of the redeemer to Boaz. She isn't being redeemed by law, by the one who actually could redeem her first.

[23 : 32] Instead, she's redeemed by Boaz, by grace. And they live happily ever after. No, that's not how the rest of the story ends. We are actually told that Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, that she became pregnant and had a son.

But then the writer of Ruth does something unexpected. Rather than rejoicing with Ruth and Boaz for having a baby, a son, he brings Naomi to the forefront again in the story.

He writes, Then the women said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a redeemer. And may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age.

For your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him. Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.

And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name saying, A son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

[24 : 44] The translators tell us that Naomi takes this baby and lays him on her lap. However, in the original language, it probably means that she took the baby, put him in her arms, and brought him up to her chest.

So she was holding him close to her heart. And it's such a beautiful picture because if you remember, in chapter one, Naomi says, I went away full, but God brought me back empty.

And in chapter four, you see empty arms no longer. Her bitter heart is no longer bitter. And God was no longer someone who took away her life, but he was the one who gave her life to the full.

In the story of Naomi, we can see our own story. Life is hard, but God is faithful. He has not left us without a kinsman redeemer.

He gave his own son for us who not only died to redeem us from sin, but to restore us and give us life to the full. Why? God delights in restoring broken things, our souls, our relationships.

[25 : 58] Our purpose, our identity, our God-given humanity. And one day, we may meet Naomi. Can you imagine that? We may meet her.

And if we do, she will no longer say, call me Mara. No. She will say, call me Naomi, because God has restored my life fully.

Now, I don't know that I can say this definitively, but I think she might also say, I wish you could have known me back then to see just how amazing God is and how committed he is to restoring not just your spiritual life, but every part of your life.

She looks like you still here as a woman who has ever told me as a woman who has ever told me as a woman who has ever told me