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Ruth 1:1-19a:

“Where You Go, I Will Go”

- I. The Naomis Who Feel Forsaken
- II. The Ruths Who Cling to Faith
- III. The Christ Who Redeems

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Imagine, for a moment, standing at a graveside three times over. First, you bury your husband or wife. Then one of your children. Then the other. The people you counted on most are gone. Those you lost were your providers who kept you safe from danger, who made sure you had all you needed. Facing financial hardship at no fault of your own, and packing up what little you have left, you have no choice but to live among strangers, in a foreign land, who do not know the Lord or share your customs. When everything familiar has been stripped away, the question that remains is the one Naomi must answer: Will you trust in the grace of the Almighty?

To be deprived of both husband and sons and to be too old to remarry was one of the worst possible situations an Israelite woman could be in. As we read just a moment ago, the book of Ruth begins with a brief but striking account of the dire situation Naomi found herself in. She was deprived of both her motherhood and of the family line. She is impoverished, vulnerable without a male protector, and a stranger in a foreign land. Not to mention that her plight occurred in the time of the Judges, which is depicted in the Bible as a time of widespread lawlessness and moral decline. As the book of Judges attests, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25). The danger then for Naomi was of a severe and very real nature, having lost the only ones who could protect and take care of her.

I. The Naomis Who Feel Forsaken

Sadness, despair, and confusion are only a few of the many emotions that Naomi felt. She had lost everything and had no reason to hope for anything. While she did not lose her faith, her words show this very thing. In verses 20-22 of this chapter, she says, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt 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?”

Have you ever felt like this? Have you felt like the Lord has abandoned you? In moments of misery, sadness, and confusion, has the Lord seemed distant from you as if He doesn't care or maybe doesn't even exist? We would be hard-pressed to find a person who has not felt this way at some point in their life. Even the man speaking before you has suffered moments when God felt distant or non-existent, at times when it seemed like I needed Him most. The strains of this life, that are rooted in the sheer corruption from sin in the world, make us feel helpless like a wounded animal with no choice but to suffer through the pain and continue in it, or give up entirely.

What feels like the Lord forsaking us is almost always a driver into despair of the type that seems impossible to escape from. Sometimes, it even grows so twisted that we fall in love with despair in a sense. Sin makes it seem normal when it's not. What's worse, it doesn't matter how faithful or unfaithful to the Lord we have been. On our own, we don't know how to find peace. While we often romanticize the book of Ruth, it is not only a book of redemption, but it also reveals the harsh reality of original sin, which is the inherited corruption of human nature, a total lack of original righteousness, and the inability to fear, love, or trust God, stemming from Adam's fall.

Let us not be mistaken, God is not the author of sin. He is not the author of those horrible things that happen to us. In fact, His intention from the very beginning was that we would live in peace and harmony with our creator. His righteous plan, which followed the fall, was all about restoring that peace and harmony. He created us to be in His image and to live in the beauty of His creation, with no pain or suffering for eternity.

Additionally, He did not create us to be robots either. He gave us the ability to think, to reason, to trust in His Word, and in the garden, to choose to obey Him. Instead, we decided to disobey Him, wanting to be Him instead of living in harmony with Him. The tragedy Naomi faced is a strong portrayal of the corruption of sin that affects every human being. It is not that God hates us, has abandoned us, or forsakes us, but that the corruption of sin is so deeply ingrained and has made us so spiritually dead that He must operate in a sin-filled world to rescue us from self-destruction.

II. The Ruths Who Cling in Faith

Much like Naomi, the Psalmist writes,

“My tears have been my food day and night while they say to me all the day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” (Psalm 42:3-5a)

The psalmist's cry could have come straight from Naomi's heart. It is the same aching question, the same longing for God's presence. And yet, just as the psalm ends with hope that refuses to die, God was not finished with Naomi either. His mercy was already there, though she could not see it. Amid her emptiness, the Lord was preparing someone to walk beside her and someone who would cling to her in love, speak words of faith when she could not, and remind her that God's grace still lives even in Moab. It is here that Ruth steps forward, not as a rescuer in her own strength, but as a living instrument of God's steadfast love.

Realistically, Ruth had no reason at all whatsoever to stick around. If she really sat and analyzed her fate, she was not only looking at harm, poverty, and danger, but she was also

looking at the potential of death from the dangers that awaited. Out of love, Naomi wanted Ruth and Orpah to avoid this obvious fate. But faith and trust, that was working alongside the conversion of Ruth, proclaimed before the hopeless and seemingly abandoned Naomi, "...where you go, I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Here, we see Ruth not just with worldly care and compassion, but also as a newly converted believer in the Messiah at work. This love given by Ruth is not learned but is given. It was not Ruth's impulse that brought her to this, but it was the Holy Spirit, working faith in her heart, that brought her to care for her mother-in-law. It was her faith in God that was given to her that taught her to stand against the status quo, to turn away from paganism, and to the God of peace who cares for His children in even the direst of circumstances. Ruth was not just a kind woman; she was the instrument of the Lord, given to comfort Naomi and all she would have to face. She was the light in an otherwise dark world. And that kind of light can only come from the Lord.

Ruth's faith still speaks to us today. The same Spirit who worked in her heart works in ours through the Word. There are still moments when the road ahead looks uncertain, when it feels safer to turn back, when despair whispers that it would be easier to think that God is against us and not for us. Yet trust like Naomi's, and faith, like Ruth's, clings to God's promises even when it cannot see their fulfillment. And just as God used Ruth to bring hope to Naomi, He still uses His people to bring hope to one another.

Every act of mercy, every prayer offered for a suffering friend, every word of forgiveness spoken in Christ's name is evidence that God's steadfast love is still alive and active in His people. You may not always realize it, but when you stand beside someone who is hurting, when you refuse to give up on a struggling brother or sister, when you remind the despairing of God's faithfulness and forgiveness, you are doing the work of Ruth. That is the Lord Jesus' hands working in you in a weary world.

III. The Christ Who Redeems

All the fear and despair that start the book of Ruth come to a swift and beautiful end. What begins with famine, death, and tears ends with faith, fullness, and joy. The same Naomi who once cried, "The Lord has brought me back empty," now praises the Lord for not leaving her without a redeemer. Through Ruth's faith and Boaz as the kinsman redeemer, God restores what sin and sorrow had taken. But even that restoration is only a glimpse of the greater redemption to come—the child born in Bethlehem whose lineage would one day bring forth the Savior of the world. In Christ, every Naomi's bitterness is turned to joy, every Ruth's faith is rewarded, and every heart that clings to the Lord finds that He has been clinging to them all along.

Indeed, it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who was born into this unbelieving world of danger, suffering, despair, poverty, sin, evil, and death, who has rescued us. It is Christ who redeems us from all the horrible things that have ever come across our table. It is Christ, who does not let us sojourn in a foreign land alone, but walks with us every step of the way to keep us on the narrow path to Heaven. The forgiveness He won for us and the ransom He paid are our sure guarantee that no matter what storms fall on us yesterday, today, or tomorrow, we are never abandoned to despair. Instead, by faith, we live in the certainty that all our sins are covered, that death has lost its sting, and that what awaits us beyond this life is not an ending, but the beginning of everlasting peace and joy in His presence.

Just as Ruth clung to Naomi with steadfast love, your Redeemer clings to you with a love far greater and far more certain. On the cross, He said to you what Ruth once said to Naomi: **“Where you go, I will go.”** He entered your suffering, your pain, your death, and made them His own. And because He has gone where you could not go and returned victoriously from the grave, you will never walk alone. Wherever you go in this life, Christ goes with you. His promise fulfilled in Word and Sacrament does not go away. He promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) And where He has gone now, to the Father’s side in glory, there He will one day bring you also.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott