

## Where you go I will go

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### Ruth 1:11-22

There is no better feeling than going home.

Last Sunday we started studying the book of Ruth.

Our main topic is *Hesed*, God's loyal love towards His creation.

From the book of the Ruth one can find an **edifying short story**.

There is **fullness and emptiness** in the story. Famine, full house, empty house, loss of husband, wedding of two sons with Moabite girls (full house), losing the sons (empty house), and so on....

We will see the sovereign God working and directing people towards His will.

We covered 15 verses

Let us start:

### Go back, Return

<sup>6</sup> she and her daughters-in-law prepared **to return** home from there.

<sup>7</sup> she had been living and set out on the road that would **take them back** to the land of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "**Go back**, each of you, to your mother's home.

<sup>10</sup> and said to her, "**We will go back** with you to your people."

<sup>11</sup> But Naomi said, "**Return home**, my daughters.

<sup>12</sup> **Return home**, my daughters;

<sup>15</sup> "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is **going back** to her people and her gods. **Go back with her.**" (Ruth1:6-8,10-12,15 NIV11)

There is a word or concept that keeps repeating in this first chapter, and it is the word "return" or "go back." It is used 10 times in the last 17 verses of chapter 1.

This repetition is telling us something:

Everyone finds protection and rest at home. Naomi is alone now. She wants to "go back" or "return" to her home. She wants her daughters-in-law to find rest in their homes. She keeps insisting that they go back home, find rest there, or find a new husband and find rest there.

Naomi is going to realize that artificial rest is nothing.

Sending them back to pagan gods and finding new husbands look like a logical solution, but not a spiritual one.

We need to learn (them and us) that finding rest is in the presence of the LORD.

**14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.** (Ruth 1:14 NIV)

We spoke about the verb **clung** last time. She **glued** herself to her Naomi.

**16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.**

**17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.**

**May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."** (Ruth 1:16-17 NIV11)

This is *hesed*, brothers and sisters, this is Ruth's **loyal love towards God** Yahweh and towards Naomi. And I will call her mother now.

Please study her pledge:

Ruth commits herself **in a binding oath**, not just to Naomi, but the Yahweh God.

-First, an oath to follow Naomi in geographical places. She will lodge wherever Naomi lodges.

-Then an oath in making a strong and permanent relationships. She commits herself to Israelite people. This her new family (new citizenship).

-Then there is a more important pledge, an oath making a relationship to Yahweh God; she refuses her gods and embraces Yahweh as her God.

-We move further to continue to see that her commitment is until her death.

-Last one, she makes her oath in the name of the Lord; she asks the Lord to take her life if she does not keep her oath. Wow, wow, wow!

Are you following me?

This is a book written during the **time of Judges**, when the nation of Israel was going through cycles of disobedience and repentance and so on. Their walk with the LORD was shaky.

We have here a foreigner (*odar*) lady committing her life to God Yahweh. Serious commitment. **She is “gluing” herself to Yahweh** (cling). She is binding to the LORD.

Ruth’s relationship with Naomi and God of Israel is more important than her family, her home, and her gods.

She is going to a **new home**, to find peace **and rest**. I can relate with that. Don’t we all like to have a home where there is peace and rest?

Let us go back to Scripture.

After Ruth’s poetic pledge,

**what would Naomi say?**

we find she says nothing. **Silence** (she is grieving)

**When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.** (Ruth 1:18 NIV11)

She accepts this reality. We don’t hear words of affirmation.

Instead of rejoicing, she changes her name to **Mara, bitter**.

**<sup>19</sup> So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”**

**<sup>20</sup> “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”** (Ruth 1:19-21 NIV11)

**Welcome back home, Naomi.**

Well, not so much. The women of the Bethlehem are surprised.

Is this Naomi? It cannot be. What happened to her?

Her answer, “Well, I am not the same person anymore.

I am changing my name. I am not ‘pleasant’ Naomi anymore.

I am ‘Mara’, bitter.”

Someone told me once **as we age, we either become better or bitter**.

Apparently, Naomi becomes bitter. “Call me Mara, bitter.”

Last Sunday I said that Naomi saw that all these tragedies happened to her because God was punishing her. “God made me widowed, and God took my sons from me etc.”

I wish she would acknowledge what happened with Ruth and say:

“My dear Ruth, my “friendship”, my daughter-in-law, אֲנִי הָיִיתִי, I am not alone. My Ruth made a covenant with me and God. She is loyal to our God and to us. Thank you, Lord, for Ruth.”

When Naomi is absorbed in pain, when she is consumed by grief, Naomi can only see what is missing. I get it...

Have you ever felt that way?

Is your self-understanding framed by what you have lost?

Even though she blames God for her condition, God graciously continues to grant compassion to her. That is *hesed*...

### **Hesed: The Lord is Working from Emptiness to Fullness**

**<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.**  
(Ruth 1:22 NIV11)

What do we find here?

The book started with famine, emptiness. We arrive to the end of chapter one with harvest, fulness. Naomi, although she feels bitter and empty, but the narrator says:

Naomi returned with Ruth.

Ruth is a Moabite. But what kind of Moabite? She made a covenant with Yahweh God, committed with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

They arrive at the time harvest.

From famine to harvest.

They arrive home...

#### **Application:**

##### **1. Please don't be stuck by seeing only your tragedies. God is at WORK**

Naomi could not see anything good coming from this return.

She could not even say a single positive word when Ruth made her oath.

Naomi comes to her home but she is not at peace. She has not found God's comfort.

“God is sovereignly at work moving her back to Bethlehem in order to bring blessing into her life once again.”<sup>1</sup> We will see this latter. They arrived harvest time. Is this coincidence? I don't think so.

How are you feeling today? Maybe you are seeing only an empty cup and no hope.

Do we see God at work when we are in a tragedy? In the midst of trials God continues to work in our lives.

**The steadfast love (Loyal love) of the LORD never ceases;  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.** (Lamentation 3:22-23 ESV)

## 2. It is Ok to Cry

When there is pain, we cry.

There is a lot of tears in this chapter. **Don't hide your pain.**

-Naomi did not hide her pain and misery.

-Jonah was angry with God, and God allowed him to have a conversation with him. Our God, our Father loves to hear from us.

-Moses was frustrated, and he cried out to God.

-David was angry that God was not listening, and he cried out to Him.

-Job was not happy even about his own existence, and he cried out to God.

It is ok to cry. In fact, the Deacons will start in the month of September a 6-session class for grieving.

A few years ago I was feeling down about my ministry. I had lost my first love to ministry (I was mourning a loss). I did not see that God was using me. I joined a group called SoulCare. It was group of 20 pastors who needed soul-care. God took me to a place where I could cry out to God. God did miracles in my life when I was honest with God. **When we admit our brokenness, God will do amazing transformation in our lives.** Why? You give the steering wheel to Him. You say, "God, you lead me...I don't get it. I don't understand why this or that happened, you lead..."

**God can turn your despair into HOPE.**

**Tears may flow in the night,**

**but joy comes in the morning.** (Psalm 30:5b MSG)

I'll give an example from a church in the Bay Area called PBCC. One of the pastors, Brian Morgan, has ministry of bringing people to write their personal poems. He uses psalms to help people write their own psalms. There is openness and healing when you put on the paper your praise, your misery, your sins, your struggles...

### 3. Don't Give Up; Keep Going...

Orpah was ok in the beginning to move forward with Naomi. Then she calculated in her head that there was no hope going with that woman. She loved Naomi. She cried with her. She decided to walk with her. Yet not all the way.

There are moments we quit.

**Ruth stayed all the way in.** She found her new HOME. She experienced *hesed*, and she expressed her loyal love to Naomi.

She wanted to follow God. Her commitment gave her energy to move forward.

We will talk about that more next week. God going to open new doors for Ruth and Naomi.

I will finish with this story

Back in Lebanon when Sevan and I were serving there, we knew a good friend by name is Hasmig (Jasmine) who was engaged to Christian missionary serving on the ships of Operation Mobilization. A month before the wedding, Hasmig's fiancé found out he had terminal cancer. What do you do? Some advised her to postpone the wedding... everyone said something. She prayed about it, and said, "This is my fiancé, and I trust God." The wedding happened. After a year, a beautiful daughter was born, and five days later the husband passed away. She was grieving. One day she stood up and said, "God, I will not ask you why you took my husband. I will ask you why you left me and our daughter here." She found a mission to find kids who are unwanted, and she started with her child now 17 years old, to serve kids.

I pray that you surrender to God, your pain, your frustrations, your grief, and ask Him to lead you in His way.

Amen

1. K. Lawson Younger Jr, *NIV Application Commentary (Judges/Ruth)*. P 430

2. Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), p66