



RUTH 1:6-13

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Good morning again, and I'll invite you to turn to Ruth 1.

We started our study in that book last Sunday, and we'll continue that this week as well.

Last week, we looked at the first five verses under the theme, when providence seems not to exist in essence.

And we saw how God, even though these events were tragic, there was still God's providential hand in the life of Ruth and Naomi, especially Naomi here in the first five verses.

And that is going to continually be a theme throughout the entire book of Ruth, throughout the entire narrative.

The providence, of course, is going to become more and more clear to Ruth as time progresses, but she couldn't see it in the first five verses.

She still won't be able to see it in the verses that we'll be looking at, which is six to 13 this morning.

And looking at the idea, the topic of when bitterness blinds us to God's grace, and Naomi was indeed blinded, and it doesn't seem like that from the outset when you read these verses six to 13.

But as we get into the text, you will realize that she was indeed blinded to the grace and the mercy of God, the providence of God because of her circumstances that she was in, and that will become very evident in the lot of verses that we're going to be looking at.

Verse six of Ruth chapter one reads, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited his people, giving them food.

So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go return each of you to your mother's house.

May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with me and the dead.

May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

And they said to her, 'No, but we will surely return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Return, my daughters.

Why should you go with me?

Have I yet sons in my womb that may be your husbands?

Return, my daughters, go, for I am too old to have a husband.

If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they're grown?

Would you therefore refrain from marrying?

No, my daughters, for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me." God, I pray that you will use me, Lord, to clearly proclaim the truth and the excellencies of your word to your people.

Open our hearts and open our understanding to receive it with joy and gladness for Christ's sake.

Amen.

I want you to think about the oyster.

It takes a grain of sand and turns that grain of sand into a beautiful pearl, and the opposite is so true of us as Christians, as believers.

Too often, we're the complete opposite.

We take pearls, and we turn them into grains of sand.

Because of our state, because of our circumstances, we transform something that is precious and make it seem. Now, it's still precious, but we, because of our circumstances, make it seem as though it is anything but precious.

Bitterness, which is the overarching theme and idea behind the passage that I want to present to you today, this encompasses both a literal sensory experience and a complex emotional state rooted in pain and anger.

While the word originally describes a disagreeable taste, it has evolved to characterize a negative emotional response that emerges when people encounter distressing situations or mistreatments at times.

Emotionally, bitterness function as an attitude of extended and intense anger and hostility, often accompanied by resentment and a desire sometimes to get even.

The condition involves several interconnected elements: unresolved anger, grief that hasn't been processed or has been processed in the wrong way, an unwillingness to accept that relationships cannot fulfill all expectations, and a sense of powerlessness.

It manifests through various behaviors, bitterness does.

Obsessive thoughts of revenge, sarcasm, self-righteousness, critical moments, traditional conflicts, or relational conflicts rather, controlling patterns, and hostility The development of bitterness follows a predictable trajectory.

It originates from refusal or refusing or inability, unable to forgive an offense.

And when left unaddressed, this unforgiveness allows hurt and anger to accumulate until they distort one entire perceptive or perspective on life in general.

And again, this is what we're going to be seeing with Ruth.

The condition proves destructively comprehensive, affecting emotional, physical, and the spiritual dimensions of an individual.

Paradoxically harms the bitter person far more than the offender.

And of course, in this context, it doesn't even harm God.

It's hurting just Naomi.

Gradually eating away at what was a soft heart and turning that heart into callousness and hardness.

And of course, this accurately describes the actions and attitude of Naomi in this text that we are going to be looking at.

In verses six to seven, our first two verses, which is where the first point comes from, there's a sense or there's this whisper of hope for Naomi and for the girls, or the women, in a world of hurt.

So there's this whisper of hope in a world of hurt.

"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited his people in giving them food or bread.

So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah." A whisper of hope in a world of hurt.

After years of heartache, within these few five verses or the first five verses that we looked at last week, finally, there's a turning point seemingly in the life of Naomi.

Slight turning point, but a turning point nonetheless.

At long last, Naomi can see a light at the end of what must have seemed to be a long and never-ending tunnel in her life.

The time to leave Moab, this cursed place, has finally come in the eyes of Naomi.

The decision to go back home came as a result of Yahweh visiting or providing for his people, and we'll get more into that as we go on.

Naomi did not view herself as an outsider.

She did not view herself, and in this, there's also that glimmer of hope.

She did not view herself as an outsider in that God has forgotten her, or she was not a part of the community of God's people anymore.

Even though she has been away for many years, she still saw herself as one of God's people.

And that's why she decided that she's going to go back.

And by mentioning the name Yahweh here in the verse, latter part of verse six, the author is trying to emphasize to the readers and to us that God has always been faithful.

That's the name, that's the meaning behind the name Yahweh that is presented here.

He is presenting Yahweh as the always faithful God.

So even though Naomi went through all of these trying times with losing her husband, losing her sons, and prior to this, having to leave Jerusalem, leave Judah, or leave Bethlehem, the author is still saying He, God never ceased to be faithful in the life of Naomi.

Despite everything that I just mentioned, God was still the faithful God that He has always been.

He once again intervened, demonstrating His faithfulness.

He once again intervened on behalf of His people, and this further indicates that He is the God who hears the cries of His people.

And He always has heard the cry of His people.

A people who, in this case, if we go back to our reference to the first verse in the chapter, this was during the time of the judges and that vicious cycle where the people would sin, God would send somebody to punishment for that sin, and of course, included in this punishment was loss of property, livestock, and famine.

Then they would cry out to God because they couldn't bear this burden any longer, and God would hear their cry and restore them.

So based on that context of the judges, we can say the children of Israel finally came to a point where they were remorseful for their sin.

Probably because, "Well, you know what?

This famine has been going on for too long, and the circumstances that we are in has been going on for far too long, and the solution to that, like we know, is to cry out to God.

So I think that's the time.

Now is the time." They were finally remorseful for their sin.

They have finally repented.

So not just remorse, but they were repentant of their sins, and they cried out to God for help.

They cried out to God for mercy.

They cried out to God for grace. And in the backdrop of this, it only took 10 years, just a minimal amount of 10 years for the children of Israel.

Imagine how bad things could have got or must have got for them to wait that long to cry out to God.

And David was similar.

I don't remember how many years it was between Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, but it was quite a number of years before David actually-- So they were familiar with that kind of attitude towards just having the hand of God so heavy on them to the point where, "Okay, I have to now fess up." Only 10 years for them to come to the realization that, "Man, this is God's hand on us in a negative way." And as we've seen before in the cycle of the judges, and as we've seen before in the wilderness, we need, as a people, to come and repent and cry out to God that he ends this punishment.

Only 10 years.

But nevertheless, they were contrite.

Nevertheless, they were remorseful.

Nevertheless, they repented.

And God was merciful, and he's always demonstrated his mercy.

Even when they were going through this sinful, rebellious state, God was merciful because his mercy has always been extended, hence why he came through for them.

This verse, which is verse six, also suggests that Christ offers spiritual nourishment in the same way that God provided food or bread for the children of Judah, for Bethlehem.

He, for us and for the entire world, provides nourishment, spiritual nourishment in his son, Jesus Christ, and John 6:35 reminds us of this.

And I don't want you to miss the personal pronoun that is used by the author in this verse, in verse six.

"The Lord visited his people." Not the people, not a people.

"The Lord visited his people." It is also implied that he was constantly with his people, patiently waiting for their return, patiently waiting for them to cry out and call out to him, to seek him, seek his face, hoping that they would find grace and mercy and look for the grace and the mercy that he offers to them.

Undoubtedly, their condition, their state would have brought sorrow to the heart of God, knowing that "This is my people, and they are doing this.

They're marring my name so badly among the nations.

They're doing the complete opposite of what I have commanded them to do," and that is to showcase to the world the power, the might, the glory, the grace, the mercy of Yahweh, and they were doing the complete opposite.

He has always been patiently waiting for them to bow the knee in surrender and repent of their sins.

And he's the same God, and whatever state you're in and whatever thing that has pulled you away from God, he's still there waiting for you to repent and to surrender and bow your knee to him, to graciously come back to him.

I'm reminded of the prodigal son's father when I read this, and in the context of that passage where it gives you the sense that the father has always been eagerly waiting, pacing back and forth, looking out the window, looking out the door, because he was hopeful that his son was going to return.

And the grace was already there for the son to lavish in, and he was patiently waiting for the prodigal son to come home.

That is our God.

That is a picture of the God that we serve.

And he came through for the people, his people.

A few things I want to highlight to you regarding the elements of divine grace that we see from this section.

First, even amid grief and pain, Naomi was able to hear good news from her God, that God has visited her homeland.

Secondly, as aforementioned, she heard that Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, which is cause for hope and assurance, and should have been cause for hope and assurance for Naomi, had intervened on behalf of his people.

Not in an extraordinary way, not in a miraculous way in terms of miracles that we are familiar with in the Old Testament, but just in the simple, profound way of providing for the needs of his people, meaning the fields were once again full.

The windows of heavens were now open for rain once again.

The livestock were thriving.

The word that the author used here for intervene or visited, it also carries a negative connotation where God will visit people to reprimand them. And of course, this was what happened while they were in the state of famine, why Naomi had to leave.

God visited them in a negative way, but here He visited them in a positive manner.

Third, the object of this divine favor, again mentioned earlier, was the people of God, and of course, I'm sure this affected others as well.

The return of the rains was a sign that God had neither forgotten nor rejected His people.

Something that they needed to be reminded of.

They weren't forgotten.

The return of the rains meant also that they weren't abandoned.

So not only were they not forgotten, not only it meant that God did not reject them, but they weren't abandoned by Yahweh.

And we might feel that way so many times, that God has forgotten about us, or we're being rejected by God, and Naomi felt like this, and she'll continue to feel like this.

And she'll express this explicitly later on in the text.

Sometimes we do feel like God has abandoned us.

He was like the father of the prodigal, as I mentioned, just eagerly, patiently waiting.

They weren't abandoned, they weren't forgotten, they weren't neglected or rejected.

Fourth, Yahweh has given His people food or bread, and the picture that would have appeared in the mind of the children of Israel or Judah or Bethlehem here in this context, and Naomi, was the house of bread has now been restocked.

That's the picture because that's the same root word that is used, "bayit lechem" which is house, bayit is house, and lechem is bread or food.

And they would get the picture of the house of bread has bread again.

It's fully restocked again, and so that's like a play on word here for the author.

God is attentive to the needs of His people, and He provides for the needs of His people in His perfect timing.

And you might say, "But why then did He withhold rain?"

Why then were there no crops in the field?

Why were the livestock suffering if He does provide for these people?" Well, ask yourself this question: Were they still alive?

They were still alive, and hence there would be nobody for Him to come to or visit and restore food and replenishment to them.

He was still caring for them, even though they were being punished for their disobedience and unfaithfulness to Him.

He provides for His people.

He's attentive to the needs of His people, but He does these things in His timing, and of course, in this context, it's hinged on them coming back to God, repenting, and relenting of the sins that they have committed that had hurt the heart of God.

He provided for Naomi and His people, as we see here.

He's aware of your needs and will provide for your needs.

And in a society and in a culture where we have interchanged and mingled and mixed those two words, needs and wants, we need to remember that He's a God that provide for our needs, not our wants.

Sometimes in His grace and mercy, He even gives us what we want, but He provides for our needs.

At this stage, as detailed throughout verse seven, the journey began with three widows.

I hope you didn't miss that.

The journey home to Judah began with the three women.

It wasn't just Naomi.

Naomi departed from Moab, leaving wherever she was staying in Moab, and decided, "I'm going to take the trip back home." God's grace often begins with a word that reaches us in whatever Moab state we're in.

Naomi hears good news while still in a foreign land, still grieving, still empty, still feels empty, and will continue to feel empty for a time.

God initiates restoration long before we feel ready for it or even realize that we're ready for restoration.

His grace reaches us where we are, not where He expects us to be.

Hence, it would not be defined as grace.

It reaches us where we are.

Like God in His mercy sent Jesus Christ while we were still sinful, while we were still in our sinful state.

Jesus Christ says, "The healthy doesn't need a doctor.

It's the sick people, and I've come to call sinners to repentance." His grace reaches us where we are.

But His grace doesn't leave us where we are.

It transforms us.

It transforms our lives so that now we can move to where God wants our lives to be.

That's His grace.

So it takes us from where we are now spiritually and takes us to where God desires us to be. These two verses, six and seven, serves and should serve as a reminder that we need to constantly be reminding ourselves of God's grace in our lives.

And this will be a difference between faith and bitterness and anger.

If we're constantly reminding ourselves, "This is God's grace.

God is a gracious God, God is a merciful God, God is a loving kindness God, God is the one that is forever faithful," it will guard our hearts, or at least a springboard into guarding our hearts towards bitterness and anger, and especially bitterness and anger towards God himself.

God's grace towards demands a positive response that is one of obedience.

For Naomi, she rose, she returned.

She left Moab.

Her faith may have been tarnished over the years, and it was, yet she had enough, just enough faith to get back up to go where she rightly belongs.

She made the step to go back to her people, the people of her God.

At this point in time, they were spiritually at the level where God desires for them to be, which is a good thing, or at least making strides towards where God desires for them to be spiritually.

Joining herself again to a community where mutual hope and trust and faith are shared, unlike the land in which she was currently living that worships idols.

And as I mentioned last week, your faith on display will affect others.

And this was very evident in the early church and throughout church history, and it is very evident here in these verses, albeit momentarily.

Despite the fact that Naomi was bitter, despite the fact that she still felt empty and she still felt that God was personally attacking her, as we'll see as we make our way through the next few verses, she still displayed enough faith.

There was something in her that grappled the attention of Ruth and Orpah, that they wanted to stick with her.

Yes, there was that idea of, "We are your daughters by marriage, and we want to be there to help you and to protect you and to provide for you." This is why it is important for us to remember that we represent God first and self last.

And in fact, I would surmise to you, we don't represent self at all.

As believers, we represent God and God alone.

So I encourage you to seek a sense of hope, even during challenging times.

I challenge you, I encourage you to be reminded that there is still hope regardless of what you're going through.

I want you to be assured that God has not forgotten you.

He has not abandoned you.

He has not neglected you, regardless of how you might think or feel.

There's that whisper of hope.

He's always there with you.

A whisper of hope in a world of hurt.

But in verses eight to 13, we see a wounded heart that cannot see straight.

"And Naomi said to her 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.

May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of your husband!' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept.

And they said to her, 'No, we will surely return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'No, return, my daughters!

Why should you go with me?

Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

Return, my daughters, go, for I am too old to have a husband.

And if I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they are grown?

Would you therefore refrain from marrying?

No, my daughters, for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of Yahweh, the hand of the Lord, has gone forth against me." One thing that we can gather from verses six and seven is that despite the signs of faith and evidence of God's grace in the life of Naomi, and sometimes even in our lives, if we apply it, there still can exist bitterness.

And you read verses eight and nine, and you're like, "Where are you getting this bitter spirit from in Naomi?" Forgetting the fact that she actually mentioned that she's bitter later on in the chapter.

But where do you see that, especially because these verses are very powerful verses that are very positive verses.

She's praying that Yahweh intervenes on their behalf, these women.

But despite this glimmer of hope or this glimmer of faith that was evident in Naomi's life, there still can exist bitterness that will cast a veil over our eyes, and it did with her, as we will see.

We can be proclaiming grace while at the same time portraying bitterness.

Do we understand that?

You can still be saying, "God is gracious, God is merciful," but you're still harboring bitterness and anger in your heart.

And such was the case with Naomi.

The text does not tell us how far they were in their journey.

Again, remember, three women set out on the journey back to Judah.

The text doesn't tell us how far they were before Naomi realized that she doesn't want them to come with her.

And mind you, another reason for this, for her not wanting them to accompany her, is that she thought and rationalized to herself that they had better chances if they just stayed in the land of Moab than go to Bethlehem.

Nonetheless, we know that she was bitter because, of course, the preceding verses.

In addition, it is possible that Naomi was even thinking about how she would be received from her own people, having left for over a decade.

Maybe my people will not be so welcoming to me as an Israelite or as a Bethlehemite, let alone two foreign women.

And if this is the case, if they won't welcome me with open arms, Orpah and Ruth will most certainly not be welcome, and they would probably be treated with hostility.

We know that she cared deeply about these two women, who obviously stuck with her the entire time of her widowhood for more than 10 years, supported her these entire years.

But this also speaks, as I mentioned earlier, the impact that Naomi had in the lives of these women.

So she urges them, she implores them, both of them, "Go back to your home.

Go back to your nationality." And of course, this suggests a cultural norm where widows might find refuge and support in their birth family.

And this reflects the ancient Near Eastern culture or custom of returning to one's family of origin in times of distress and need.

But also embedded in the phrase "mother's home," it didn't say father's for a reason, is the idea of them finding love and privacy, as we see in Genesis 24, verse 28 with Rebecca.

So the phrase has more to do with love and marriage than even security and refuge.

So that's what Naomi was desiring and hoping for.

"You go back to your mother's home, and then you wait for husbands." And verse nine, of course, will re-emphasize this.

She prays that they will experience from God, the same God that she's proclaiming, the same merciful, forever gracious God, the same loyal love, that covenant-keeping love, that's the word that she uses, that they have been demonstrating to her over these years.

And by stating the name of Yahweh, Naomi's assuming here that the God that she serves has the authority to extend grace beyond the nation of Israel.

So to the other nations, the grace that God has been showing, this loving kindness, this loyal love, is seen by Naomi as something that can and will be extended to these Moabite women.

And on the surface, this seems, as I mentioned, like she was displaying extraordinary faith in God here.

But this will be compromised in verse 15.

We'll see that next week.

Her prayer also assumes that Yahweh was interested in the affairs of this family, of Orpah, and Naomi, and Ruth, and he could be called upon to be favorable on their behalf.

In this term, the term kindness, we see a God of love.

That's what Naomi is professing to these women.

He is a God of love.

He's a God who keeps his covenant.

He's a faithful God.

He's a merciful God.

He's a gracious God.

He's a kind God, and loyally demonstrates his acts of devotion to his people.

This divine act would reverse the years of pain and grief that these women have experienced.

And of course, it was just the women.

God's grace and mercy and loving kindness could only be extended to Ruth and Orpah.

If you follow the logic of Naomi's argument, there's nothing left for her, and we'll see that.

It's just these women.

So God is powerful and capable to restore these women, but not her.

Her desire is that Yahweh grant these women security in their respective household when they do find husband.

She prays that they will be worry-free.

She prays that they will be spared from life's restless wandering That might lie ahead should they take this journey with her.

She prays that they will experience peace, permanence, and satisfaction of having their daily lives met instead of potentially foraging constantly for the rest of their lives for food.

The heart of this verse is Naomi's desire that these women find security, provision, and a stable future.

And this was something that widows in the ancient Near East was desperate for.

So again, on the surface, nothing wrong with what she's saying here.

So amid this love and cheer shown for these women, despite pronouncing a blessing on them for their future, these women were determined to go with Naomi.

What young widow would reject the thought of being remarried, starting a family, having your needs met for by a loving husband?

Orpah and Ruth, clearly, from their response in verse 10.

They said, "No, no, on the contrary." This is similar to what Paul uses, perish the thought.

"On the contrary, we will go with you." Willing to sever whatever ties they had with their family members back in Moab, their own people, and attach themselves to a foreign people, a people that they don't know.

And this, again, is confirmation that they were more attached to Naomi than with their own people.

But verses 11 to 13 sees Naomi taking a negative approach to try to convince these women to go back to their own families and to forget about her, because that's implied in there, "Just forget about me.

Life for me is over.

I'm hopeless.

I'm just going to be dragging you down with my hopelessness if you were to come with me." So these blessings, even though they seem to be positive and good, Naomi was strongly implying that, "If you come with me, all of these things that I said, probably not going to happen.

Probably never going to happen.

God is capable of doing it if you stay, but I'm not sure if you were to come with me to Bethlehem, how things would work out." Challenging them, she challenged them with a series of rhetorical questions to prove that there is no future for them, absolutely none whatsoever, in the land which is called the house of bread.

But there's no future there for them should they go with her.

A series of questions that shows that she was hopeless, and in her mind was hopeless for the remainder of her life, and will be empty for the rest of her life.

Her question, "Why would you go with me?" seems like a good question on the surface, but this was a question of rebuke.

She was actually rebuking them because they were determined in verse 10, "No, no, on the contrary, perish the thought that we would ever desert you." And she rebuked them, said, "How dare you want to come with me," basically.

It could be rephrased in this way: "It is foolish, utterly foolish for you to go with me.

You would be much better off in your own country." And I want us to pause there for a moment and analyze how clouded Naomi's vision actually was.

And again, this always has been this way, but it's just becoming evident now as we make our way through the text.

She would be bringing Ruth and Orpah to a place where the same God that she desires to bless them has put in place measures to protect widows, orphans, and foreigners.

Exodus 22:22-23 reminds us of this.

Deuteronomy 10, verse 18 also does so.

And Deuteronomy 24:19-20, where Israel was commanded to leave.

Here it is.

She was concerned that, "If you come with me, life is hopeless.

You might have to fend for your life for food, and I'm not sure how that's going to work out.

You're not going to be blessed.

You're not going to have posterity.

You're not going to have husband." But in Deuteronomy 24:19-21, Israel was commanded, it wasn't suggested, it was commanded by Yahweh, the same God that she was pronouncing and proclaiming to the women, to leave behind grain, olives, grapes for widows, which they would be qualified, for orphans and for foreigners, which Ruth, again, and Orpah would be qualified for.

A law that both Ruth and Naomi will eventually benefit from as we make our way through the narrative, as opposed to the land of Moab, where it seems, and it's clear, and it's evident that no such law was in place.

The fact that there's no mention of any relative or any male figure in the lives of these women through the entire decade plus that they've been living in Moab strongly suggests These people were looking at these women and say, "You know what?

Fend for yourselves." But this is where she wanted them to remain, as opposed to with a people that will surround them with love, and at this point in time where they've got back to a place of restoration and realization of who God really is, would lavish on them who Yahweh really is, and that would have a significant impact on their life.

It is safe to say that Naomi's prayer was more of one of hope, a Hail Mary, so to speak, rather than God really intervening or praying that God intervened for these women.

The text screams that this is a place where these women, all three of them, had to fend for themselves, yet she thought they'd be better off there.

Going off the assumption that she can still bear children after a decade of widowhood, and that these children would somehow give birth, or she would give birth to sons.

She asked, "Would you wait?

Would you remarry?" Getting married is the only thing that was concerned for Naomi, for these women.

That was their best way out of this miserable life that they've been experiencing.

Naomi was speaking from her emptiness.

She was speaking from her frustration.

She was speaking from her anger, and this is very evident in the following verses.

She sees herself as hopeless, incapable of aiding them in any way, shape, or form.

Her focus was singular: "Just go get married, have kids, and enjoy your life.

Forget about me," as I mentioned earlier.

Naomi was not merely stating her age.

She is dismantling every conceivable reason for these women to stay with her or come along with her to the journey back home.

She cannot remarry.

In her mind, in her life, her life is passed beyond the point of renewal.

She cannot provide them with sons to continue that custom of the Levirate marriage, where brothers or close relative marry to maintain the family line.

She does not have that prospect anymore.

That is not an option anymore.

She sees herself as a dead end, a cul-de-sac for these women.

No future, no lineage, no security.

This was her at her most bitter moment.

And although she was trying to protect these women in some way, shape, or form, her bitterness and anger towards God was blinding her from the reality of what she should be doing.

In the same way her husband was blinded to the fact that he should have stayed and confessed, and weep, and cried out to God instead of running away, going to Moab.

This was a bitter woman, and this was clearly a bitterness that has been festering for more than just a few weeks or a few days.

This was a bitterness that has been festering for more than a decade.

Going all the way back to verse one, when she had to leave her home and her relatives, that was the springboard.

That was where this bitterness started.

"I have to leave my comfort zone." This bitterness saw her blaming God for her crisis.

Not the people who caused God to act, but God.

She was blaming God and believed that she was the undeserving target.

That's what she said in the closing verse of this section, verse 13: "The hand of the Lord has gone out against me." She saw herself as a victim of God, and God was purposely targeting her for whatever reasons.

Have you ever felt like that in your life?

Do you feel like this even as I speak, like you think God is purposely attacking you, he's purposely going after you?

You're the undeserving target of a righteous and a holy God.

Do you feel sometimes, or right now, that God has placed a "kick me" sign on your back, and then watching people and laughing as they act upon the sign that they saw?

This was how Naomi felt, that God put a "kick me" sign on her back, and God was enjoying the fact that people were kicking her.

What in your life, this very moment, that has caused you to become either bitter towards God, bitter towards a saint, a person that is a believer in Christ, or someone in your community?

What is it that has caused you bitterness and anger?

Have you dealt with that bitter spirit?

Have you dealt with that bitter spirit that is hindering, without a doubt, your vision?

Based on experience and from our text Harboring a bitter spirit, it does not get any better.

It will never get any better.

It will only get worse and worse.

And you might be thinking, "I'm not expressing it in any way, shape, or form, so for now, I'm good." Eventually, what's in here is going to come out, and it's going to be expressed whether you like it or not.

Things don't get better when we fester bitterness.

They tend to get worse, and we see this in the case of Naomi.

Naomi was convinced that the events that had transpired in her life up to this point, it was the hand of God on her.

And to a great degree, she was right.

If we go back to last week and see that this was God's providence.

But of course, she couldn't see the good of it, and she couldn't see their fault and their sins and their disobedience, in that it was just God.

God was against her, according to her.

She could not see the fault of her deceased husband, who led her and her sons away from God where God wanted them to be, away from a situation that God wanted them to deal with.

No, she saw this as Yahweh being very harsh on her.

Not hard so much, but harsh on her.

And in response I'll just become a bitter woman.

I won't deal with that bitterness.

I won't deal with that anger.

I won't deal with this emotional thing that is depriving me in my spiritual life and hindering me in my walk with God and my brothers and sisters in Christ.

I'll just become bitter.

I'll just harbor it.

I'll just become angry, or whatever the case may be in your life.

The same woman, this is what I want to highlight, the same woman that moments ago we read it, we saw it in the text, it's still there in the text, moments ago was imploring Yahweh to be gracious to these women, to provide for them husbands and peace and security, has turned around and accused God.

How would that affect these women?

Can you imagine witnessing to somebody say, "God is so merciful, He's so gracious." Oh, I can't even imagine.

Like John says, "If I had the ocean was ink," or this music says, the song says, "And then every single human being on this earth was a scribe by trade, I couldn't write down how much God is gracious to me." But in the same breath, you say, "You know what?"

This thing happened to me, and I can't believe God allowed this to happen.

I cannot believe He did this to me." How do you think that witness would pan out?

This is what Naomi was doing here.

"God will bless you.

God will give you husbands, and God will give you children.

The God that took my husband and the God that took my sons away from me, and the God that makes my life hopeless and miserable.

But hey, He's going to bless you." Lacking awareness of human causation behind her tragedies.

Lacking awareness that even after 10 years that it took for her people to repent of their own sins, she accused God of being unjust towards her.

We can get there in our lives, too, if we're not careful, if we haven't been there already or are not there now.

This verse is a reverse of what we see in James 3 verse 9, where James is saying you can't be blessing men and cursing God at the same time.

So that just doesn't make any sense.

Here we see a reverse where she's evoking blessing on these individuals, but she's cursing God, accusing God.

Naomi reads her circumstances as a divine hostility targeted at her specifically.

It wasn't anybody else, it was just her.

But the narrator knows what Naomi doesn't at this point.

God is already orchestrating her restoration.

God is going to meet her by His grace, by His mercy, where she is, so that He can use His grace and mercy to take her where she needs to be from a spiritual perspective.

I want to say this as I close.

Naomi says, "The hand of God is heavy on me." And again, she was indeed right, even though she was accusing God wrongfully here.

In a sense, she was right because that was the providential hand of God in her circumstances.

Psalms 32, David made a similar statement, but he realized that it's because of his wrongdoing why God's hand was heavy on him, where he said, "The hand of God was heavy on me.

Day and night was heavy on me." You might feel like that sometimes.

You might feel like God's hand is heavy on you, whether it's because of sin or whatever the case may be.

God is testing you and wanting to refine you, and it might feel like His hand is heavy and it's unbearable because He's a sovereign, all-powerful God.

But can I say this as I close?

A heavy hand of God on you is better than no hand of God on you at all. Naomi couldn't see this, and a lot of times we can't see this.

Like, "Man, why is God doing this to me?"

Why is God doing this to me?" And not realizing if He cares for you that much, that He's still giving you a spanking.

If He didn't care for you, you wouldn't have that statement to make, "His hand isn't on me." So a heavy hand of God in your life is better than the hand of God not in your lives at all.

Be careful of how we let emotional things, whether it's bitterness, anger, whatever it is, clouds our vision, clouds our judgment and our action from the grace and the mercy of God.

Lord, we are so thankful and so grateful for your love towards us.

God, we're thankful for this passage of scripture that we can learn so much from the life of Naomi, Lord, even though we take from the negatives, Lord, and with a desire to make them positive traits in our lives.

Forgive us, Lord, when we have wrongfully accused you, whether it's because of things that we have done and you're punishing us, or you trying us and molding us and fashioning us more into the likeness in the image of Your Son and our Savior.

And we see that as you purposely targeting us, putting a bullseye on our backs, and not seeing it as your grace and your hand of mercy and care in our lives.

Strengthen us, Lord, and may we take these words from these passages or these pages of scripture, apply them to our lives, be mindful, and be reassured that you are the God who gives us hope.

You are the God that gives us grace.

You are the God that every single morning we wake up, we have new mercies waiting for us by your grace.

May we never forget this, regardless of our circumstances and our situation.

May we never get to the point, and if anyone is there, Lord, to the place where Naomi or going down that pathway where Naomi is at this point in our text, may you convict them and convince them of who you are, and may they relent, repent of this pathway that they're going down, and return to Jesus Christ and His grace and His peace, His security in their lives.

So we thank you, Lord, for these words, and may they be a constant reminder to us as we go throughout another week.

For Christ's sake, amen.