

(The Book of Ruth) 1. Naomi - the Prodigal Daughter

by Roy Hession

The book of Ruth is a powerful example of God's redemption and restoration in the lives of his people, and serves as a reminder that failure with God is never final.

Duration: 53:42

Scripture: Ruth 3:9, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Naomi"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of gaining worldly possessions at the expense of one's relationship with God. He emphasizes that when a person loses their soul in pursuit of worldly things, they cannot regain it. The preacher also addresses the idea that some people are drawn back to the world because they find the Christian life dry and lacking joy. He encourages listeners to seek the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his faith, which may have been lost due to mistakes and wrong choices. The preacher suggests that difficult situations should be seen as opportunities for growth and learning from God, rather than as punishments.

Transcript

Now, in these mornings together we're going to look at a very lovely little Old Testament book, the book of Ruth. It consists of just four chapters, and I suggest that in your personal devotions you possibly might, for a few days, break your usual course of reading, whatever it is, to read for yourself the book of Ruth. You need to be familiar with the text of it, before we get to its inner meaning.

And it is dealing with matters that are not familiar to all of us, naturally. I've had to do quite a lot of thinking and research to understand what's going on in the story before us. But it is one of the sweetest books in the Old Testament, and how thankful we are, or ought to be, to the Holy Spirit that he guided that this book should be included in the canon of Scripture.

I suppose we could entitle the overall studies we shall have as our nearest kinsmen. We sang last night that chorus which is based on this book, cover me, cover me, extend the border of thy garment over me, because thou art my nearest kinsman. Cover me, cover me, cover me.

And this book gives us a unique picture of Jesus as our nearest kinsman. Now we're going to read together the first chapter. There's no other way, but to read it, it takes valuable time.

But probably the reading of Scripture is more important than the exposition on our part of it. All right then, the book of Ruth, it comes after the book of Judges, first chapter. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife and the name of his two sons, Marlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they came into the country of Moab and continued there. They only intended it to be a sojourn, a temporary stay, but they went on and on before the normal limit, beyond the normal limits of a temporary stay.

They continued there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. And she was left, and her two sons.

And they took the wives of the women of Moab. The name of the one was Orpah, the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelled there about ten years, rather a long sojourn, temporary stay, wasn't it? And Marlon and Chilion died also, both of them.

And the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. Can you conceive of a more bereft position for this widow in a foreign land, left of husband and two sons, and linked with two daughters-in-law of another culture, perhaps of another color? Verse six. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab.

For she had heard in the country of Moab how the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her. And they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

And Naomi said unto her daughters-in-law, go return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that ye may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept. And they said unto her, surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, turn again, my daughters.

Why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way. For I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband also tonight, and should also bear sons, would ye tarry for them until they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters, for it grieveth him much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods.

Return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee. For whither thou goest, I will go.

And where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and most important of all, thy God shall be my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.

The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death past thee and me. And when she saw that she was steadfast in mind to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they too went, until they came to Bethlehem.

And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them and said, is this near me? Come back after ten years, we never thought we'd see her again. Praise God she's come back. And she said unto them, call me not near me, which means pleasant.

Call me Mara, which means bitter, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. A very important sentence for our study.

Why then call ye me near me, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabites, her daughter-in-law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.

Although this book is entitled Ruth, the central character in the first chapter at least is Naomi. And as you've read that through, did you not see similarities between her and the story that Jesus told about the prodigal son, who went away into a far country, who went out full, and returned empty? And I believe we can call Naomi the prodigal daughter of the Old Testament, because there's so many points of similarity to the prodigal son of the New Testament. Now the book of Ruth is an epic on the great subject of redemption, because the whole story is based on certain ancient laws of Moses, which gave a man's next of kin the right to redeem for him his family lands that he may have sold because of poverty.

And the next of kin was always regarded as the redeemer on behalf of his poverty-stricken relative, and that next of kin was given this right to undo the transaction and restore the lost lands to that impoverished family. More than that, the next of kin, under the laws of Moses, had the right where his brother or relative had died without issue to take on the widow as his wife and raise up seed to his brother, and so that that seed would not bear his name but his brother's name, and that that seed should inherit the lands that were his father's. Otherwise, lands, family lands, first a portion to each tribe, under Joshua, by God's command, would perhaps be lost to that family.

And God intended in his kindly laws that a family need never lose, finally, their ancient lands. More than that, that the family name need never be extinguished in Israel, because if there was a kinsman, he could raise up seed to his brother, and thus the family name of his brother be continued, and that line inherit the family estates. All this, provided there was a next of kin willing to do his part.

Such next of kin was given, as I have said, the right to redeem all that his brother in his poverty might have sold. He could go to the purchaser and demand that he buy back what his brother had sold. The purchaser couldn't say, no, it's done.

You can't be undone. In every such contract, this clause was clearly understood by everybody. You bought that land with this provisor.

But if there was a next of kin who had the wealth to do it, he had the right to come and redeem that which his brother had sold. And the purchaser couldn't say him name. And the book of Ruth is a beautiful instance of how this kindly law of Jehovah worked out in this case.

There are other smaller instances, but I don't know any real clear-cut instance how these laws referred to in Deuteronomy 25 and Leviticus 25 actually worked out in their lives. And the key verse of this book is, I

suggest, Ruth 3 verse 9, where Ruth says to Boaz, we're anticipating the story of course, I am Ruth, thine handmaid. Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman.

Asking him to spread his skirt over her in that barn that night wasn't immodest. It was a symbolic act whereby she claimed that he would exercise his right to redeem her lost family inheritance and take her off as his wife. Poor, impoverished Ruth made her appeal to this kindly law of Jehovah, to a man who was only too willing to do the part of her kinsman.

The beauty of the whole thing was that the package deal meant he not only could redeem the inheritance, but he must take on Ruth and he had no problems about wanting to do that. For as he'd watched her work in the field, as a result of knowing that costly decision she'd made to come back with her alien mother-in-law and trust herself to the God of Israel, he'd lost his heart to her. Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman.

Now, redemption is the great activity of the great of grace of God. It is THE activity of grace. Two great activities of God, one is creation and the other is redemption.

Because the first activity went all wrong. Satan came in and spoiled it. And what did God do? He didn't give it up.

He didn't grow discouraged. But he made it again, another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. To create, God had only got to speak and it was done.

But to redeem, he had to bleed. And he was willing to do that. Redemption, I suggest, can be defined as that activity of grace whereby that is restored which we have lost or forfeited by our own fault.

Failure with God, listen, is never final. When everything's gone wrong, there's always this glorious possibility that grace can gloriously redeem, in the grandest style, everything that has gone wrong. And redemption is God doing all that by the payment in his Son of an immense price.

Now, mostly we equate redemption with the forgiveness of sins, according to Ephesians 1, where it says we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Thank God redemption does include that, but I believe if you import into the New Testament word redemption, the Old Testament meaning of the word redemption, you see it's a far bigger word than that which only deals with the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is that activity of God, but God only forgives a man's sins, but restores all the loss occasioned by his sin and occasioned by his folly, and what loss? We saints are subjected to because of folly and sin and pride and wrong.

We lose our experience of blessedness. Where is the blessedness I knew? Where once, when first I saw the Lord, where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his faith? We've lost it. We find ourselves in complicated situations, people against us.

We've made mistakes, we've made wrong investments, we've made wrong choices because of self-will, and we've landed ourselves in sometimes terrible situations. And rightly understood, though you're inclined to blame everybody else, you're the man, and you'd better admit it if you want to know recovery. Broken relationships, relationships with this one and that one, sometimes in the home, sometimes with brothers in the church, sometimes with other people in the world.

God intended them, between you and them, to be so different from what they've become, but they've been destroyed and broken and marred. But failure with God is never final. He's the God of redemption, and when he moves in to redeem, he not only forgives the sin that's caused it, but he restores the whole situation in which we've landed ourselves as a result.

And when God starts doing that sort of thing, I want to tell you, he does it in style. He gives back to a man far more than he forfeited the cause of his sin, so that that man cannot go on blaming himself or with recrimination. He's lost in wonder, love, and praise at all that grace has done for a poor old failing saint when he went to the cross.

Oh, this God of redemption. And this book is an epic on this subject. This word redemption is another one of those words that begins with R-E.

That lovely prefix, a Latin prefix, which means again, restoring, regaining, renewing, regenerating, revival. In other words, I don't think there's a lot of difference in my mind between redemption and revival. Indeed, we can say that this book is an epic on revival.

It is God doing something again. And this is what we've got pictured for us here. Now, this first chapter is a very important one.

You know, every preacher knows he's got to begin with a sense of need. He can't be too positive. He must let people see that they're in a state of need which requires the provision he's going to speak about.

And so it is, before we have anything to do with redemption in Ruth, you have brought before us a state of trouble and loss which occasioned their need of redemption by somebody. And that's what the first chapter is all about. It starts with a very happy family living in a town called Bethlehem.

The father's name was Elimelech, which means in Hebrew, God is king. They lived in a town called Bethlehem, which in Hebrew means the house of bread. Very fruitful town, all the fields round were always fertile and they lacked nothing, did they? In Bethlehem it was indeed a house of bread.

And Nehemi, his wife, by her name means pleasant. And how fitting that that should be her name in this happy family. And then they had two sons, Marlon and Chilion.

Well, Hebrew scholars seem to differ on this, and so I select that view which accords most with my message this morning. Marlon, according to one book of reference, means song, and Chilion means fullness. I tell you, wasn't that significant? What a family! God was king, they lived in a house of bread, theirs was a pleasant experience full of song and satisfaction.

And that's a beautiful picture of what life in Christ was meant to be. Now that you've come to the Lord Jesus, God is intended to be your king, ruling in all things. And when he does so, you and I find ourselves living in a house of bread.

He that believeth on me shall never hunger, and he that cometh to me shall never thirst. Real satisfaction. Doesn't mean to say situations are always easy, but in your heart you're at peace.

Yes, and we can be called pleasant. All our ways of pleasantness, and all our paths of peace, on the inside, even if sometimes we have difficult times on the outside. We have the Marlon experience of songs and praises of such a Lord who's meeting us in all our needs and problems, and Chilion, we're filled and

satisfied.

And I believe that was God's intention for the Christian life. It is his intention, where he is king. But then we come to the fact that there came a day when there was famine in the land, and in Bethlehem, the rains ceased to give forth their fruit-bearing moisture.

And that not one year, but several years. And the crops failed. And there was a terrible famine in that land of Bethlehem.

Really, it is what, the very opposite of what you would have expected. Listen, a famine in the house of bread. Why, it's a very denial of the name of Bethlehem.

Did God not say about that promised land, it was going to be a land of milk and honey, wherein they would eat bread without scarceness? Indeed he did. Yes, but he also said in many places that if his people who were called by his name should turn away from him, and worship other gods, and transgress his laws, and not depend, he might well find it necessary to shut up heaven, that there be no rain. Even to command the locusts to devour the land.

And even on occasions to send pestilence among his people, if they turned away from him, and would not heed his promises. And that too is pictorial of what happens, sadly, in the life of a Christian. Yes, it is a land of milk and honey for him, but if he turns away from the Lord his God, in this matter and that matter, and will not heed the word of correction, that God is sure to give him, he sometimes finds it necessary for that saint to shut up heaven over his head.

That there be no rain, that the moving of the spirit is no longer known, that the Bible becomes dead, prayer is empty, witness is a chore, the work of God is an artificial, mechanical thing. And he loses his joyous testimony. Yes, it's terrible, this possibility that there can be a famine in our souls.

Hosea is it, or Amos rather, he talks about a famine, not of want of water, nor of want of bread, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. That's a famine indeed, when we cease to hear from heaven. And who of us hasn't known times of such famine, when nothing moves us, the Bible doesn't move us, the preachers don't move us, the songs don't move us, the whole thing's dead and unreal.

And this can take place in the house of bread. But God had also said that if his people who were called by my name, finding themselves in such a situation, should humble themselves and pray, and seek his face, and turn from their wicked ways, then, wonderful grace, he would hear from heaven, he would forgive their sin, and he would heal their land. And this is really what Elimelech should have done when he found himself in the midst of this famine.

Doubtless, possibly, he was a leading man. And instead of moving out to what he thought were more fertile fields, he should have stayed where he was, and led the people in days of prayer, and humbling, and repentance. He should have been one of those that sought the face of God to know for what reason God had shut up heaven.

He should have been one of those that led the people in humbling themselves in confession, and putting right whatever God showed was wrong. And there would have been no doubt, God would have heard from heaven. God would have forgiven their sin, God would have healed their land, but he didn't do it.

Finding himself in a time of famine, he found another way out. Moab, the Gentile heathen country next door, they didn't seem to have any famine. Their fields were green.

And so instead of staying and repenting, he gathered his little family together, and they moved off to this other country, the land of Moab. And in doing so, he left his precious family inheritance, which had been theirs ever since it was apportioned to them in the days of Joshua. Oh, he said, I'm only going for a short time, just a sojourn.

It was a long sojourn. He continued there. He found the place to his liking, and ultimately that family were there for ten whole years.

Now this is what we do so often when we're in our times of famine. Rather than seek the Lord for what cause I'm in this state, for what cause I'm so cold and out of touch, we hardly admit we are cold. We hardly admit we are in famine, but we know we're not satisfied.

And so we look at other fields. The fields of the world in one way or another, it may not be always so ostensibly bad, and yet on the other hand it may. And the reason why some people go back to the world so ostensibly is not because the world is so attractive, but the Bethlehem is so dry.

Jesus isn't real. I've got to do something with my life. I've got to have some little fun, some little joy.

I must have something to occupy my time, and amongst the saints there's nothing there. It's all so dead and dry. Whose fault is it? But that which is the joy of the saints is so dry to you.

It's your own fault that we don't see it. Oh, that's what it's for. Stick another conference maybe, but frankly your heart is set on the fields of Noah.

Something of the world away from God. Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction.

But frankly your heart is set on the fields of Noah. Something of the world away from God. And so we go like the prodigal son did, and like Naomi did, into the land of Noah.

Define some worldly substitute to give us a little lift instead of finding our thrills in Jesus, as perhaps we did at one time. And never from my Lord depart in him of every good possessed we sang last night, but we forsake that, because the cost of enjoying it is rather humbling to enjoy it again. And we go down to the fields of Noah.

Of course then you're going to be a short sojourn, just a temporary residence, just a little outing, just a short time, just lower the standards, let's go in for something else. But you know that short time isn't always such a short time. There we are to this day in the land of Noah, having forsaken the enjoyment of our once fruitful fields.

Well the lovely thing is this, it almost seems that very soon after they got into the land of Noah, God began to work to bring them back. Such is the love of God. And he used two things to bring Naomi back, for her to reverse that ill-conceived decision and come back.

The first thing, he put his hand of discipline upon her family. First her husband Elimelech died, and here was this widow in a foreign country. Ah, but she had her two sons, and they would be breadwinners for her until God touched them too.

And she was really bereft, left of her husband, left of her two sons, alone in the world, in a country to which she didn't really belong. And she said, I don't really deserve the name of Naomi which pleasant, which means pleasant. The name that describes me is Mara, which means bitter.

And you know the love of God for us is no sooner than you get away, in either a large or a small degree, than this love works to bring you back. And what he uses to bring us back is very often his discipline. First of all, Elimelech dies.

God ceases to be our king. That's a loss indeed. Though at first we don't seem to mind, but then we find Marlon and Chilion die.

We lose our song. It's a faint memory. And you come here and listen to the joy of others with a strange wonder.

It used to be yours, you've lost your song and your satisfaction. And then he allows us to come into grave and difficult situations, taking a hand to ensure that they are as difficult as they've been. And when we find ourselves in such, you're not to say, why has this happened to me, but rather, what is God trying to teach me in this? And we become Maras rather than them.

And our experience of life is bitter. These are not punishments. These are not punitive in their intention, only and always restorative in their intention.

They're not enough to be regarded as a punishment for sin. I don't care what the loss is, how grievous, how calamitous. That's no punishment for sin.

The only adequate punishment for sin was what Jesus bore in his body on the tree for us. There I see the due reward of my sins. No, this that comes to us is designed to bring us back, designed to provoke us, designed to make the far country a little less pleasant to stay there, designed to cause us to repent.

Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face, but he's not going to let you off. He won't let you down, but he won't let you off. He's intent, man, in having us right back in the place of blessing and joy once again.

And then the second thing that God used to bring near me back was news of revival back home. Of course, that's what it really was. This is one of the great revival texts.

Indeed, one of our conferences in Switzerland, this was their text. The Lord has visited his people in giving them bread. Why, that's revival.

Here's a situation of famine. But the famine's been lifted. The rains have come.

The fields are fruitful once again, and the people are rejoicing. It can only mean that someone had done some repenting back home in Bethlehem. Oh, there'd been a prophet or two who told the people what was wrong, and the people had responded and back home.

God had been gracious and healed the land, and there were days of revival. And this news penetrated to poor Nanny in her terrible poverty. Oh yes, perhaps she was right in saying things were all so dry in Bethlehem.

Perhaps you are too, so dry amongst the saints. But listen, you can hear news in your land of Moab that things are no longer dry among the saints. God's been moving in revival among the saints.

Some of them have been repenting, and putting things right, and seeing Jesus again. And the Lord's visited his people in bringing, in giving them bread. And I tell you, that has a strange effect on Nannies in their Moab country.

And sometimes we will meet a Christian, and we find them radiant and full of joy, sharing their joy with us, we in our misery. And then they'll say, but it wasn't always like this. Oh, such a time, such a bad time.

I've been so dry, I've had such situations to face, but God helped me to come to the cross, and now all things are new. Oh, what an effect a testimony like that has on Nanny. And you say, my, if God can do that for him, he can do something for me.

And you know, she's beginning to get on her way back home. And she repented, there's no doubt at all. She repented of ever having left Bethlehem in the first place.

In one place, she says, the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. In another place, in this first chapter, she says, the Lord has dealt bitterly with me. In another place, she says, the Almighty has testified against me, and afflicted me.

And in saying this, there's no complaint. Obviously you can read that. Just a gracious, humble recognition that she's been suffering under the hand of God, which she needed to do.

And she admits it now. She says, God who's done this, I never should have gone away from Bethlehem. And you know, God knows how to bring us to repentance.

Say, oh God, you're right, I'm wrong. Oh, don't miss the blessing of the things he allows to happen. Ask him what he's teaching you.

And even if you don't regard yourself, anybody else regards you as a disobedient saint. Therefore you say, oh he cannot be dealing with something in me. I want to tell you this.

God is on a recovery operation for each one of us. None of us know how far the loss of the fall has gone in us. And even in the most obedient saint, God is still on a recovery operation.

There's great areas that still need to be recovered. Although outwardly that saint may not be a disobedient one, but God knows there are areas that still need to be shown up as sin. And oh, it's a lovely thing when he shows us for what cause his hand has had to go out against us.

He'll show you. It may not be what I would say, may not be what you may say. It may be just something to get something fresh and new out of you.

But very often there's an area which needs to be shown up where self has been intruding. May not always be so. But if you've got an honest heart, he'll show you.

And you'll have the opportunity of taking the same stand that Nehemiah did and coming back. I've wandered far away from God. Now, on this new point, I'm coming home.

Now this is the great point I want to make. This is the important part. Nehemiah came back to nothing.

She came back, thank God. But to what? To nothing. She herself says, I went out full and the Lord has brought me home again empty.

She came back. Oh, they'd gone out with some money. She came back with none.

Her friends, her contemporaries, they were all well off, farms were prospering. She came back with none. She came back without a husband, without sons, without grandsons.

Her contemporaries, when she came back, their husbands were still with them, their sons were still with them, and they were surrounded with grandchildren. But she came back with nothing except a Gentile daughter-in-law of another race. And she was very doubtful how they would accept this alien girl she'd brought back with her.

And she came back without land. Now, I thought, first of all, that Elimelech must have sold his family lands ere he left, because we are told of how they were redeemed. But in closer looking at the whole story, it is clear that those lands were not actually sold before they went.

They were still there, but neglected for ten years, overgrown, lying fallow, the old farmhouse all broken down. And she came back with no men to work the farm, to work the family lands, and quite obviously, one of the first things she'd have to do pretty soon would be to sell her lands to the highest bidder. And there was the possibility of those precious family lands, which every Jew regarded as being so important, passing out of the family.

And so they were virtually sold. And so she came back without land. And all she came back was with this Gentile daughter-in-law, who for some strange reason had chosen to share her misery and poverty.

Now, this is the important thing. When you come back, you come back, it would seem to nothing. You come back with nothing.

It's true of us, we went out full, but the Lord has brought us home again. Oh, thank God he's brought me home again, but he's brought me home again empty. Now, this is our situation, and it's shown very clearly in Matthew 16, if you like to turn to that very well known scripture.

Matthew 16, verse 26, and this is so well known that I think we may have missed a very interesting thing in it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? There are two questions. What is a man profited if, to gain what the world has to offer, he loses his soul, he parts with his relationship with God? Then it goes on to say, having lost his own soul, what could he now give to get it back? And the answer is nothing.

He's made a transaction, parted with his soul to get the world, he sees he's made a foolish thing, he's parted with his most precious thing in life, but having done it, he can do nothing to get it back. That's what it means. In other words, the effects of sin and folly in our lives and our situations, apart from the grace of God, are irrecoverable.

Having done it, what can you do to undo it? Having sinned, what can you do to atone for it? Having messed up things, what can you do to get them straight? Having lost your experience of blessing, what can you do to recover it? You've tried, so have I. If you can become a better Christian, you recover it. The moment I feel I've got to get a little bit better, I find it becoming that little bit better that defeats me, and I never make it. And there are times when I've got cold and away from God, and although I know these

things in my head, the devil tells me, you'll never get back, you'll never be where you were.

Some have said the wrong thing and give wrong impressions of being a bad witness and demonstrate of the flesh. What in the world would people think? What can I do to put it right? And you try, try to be a bit nicer to people, it doesn't seem to do. And so it is.

This verse teaches us that when we've sold our most precious possessions because of sin and desire for the world, there's nothing apart from the grace of God that you can do to recover it. You come back like Nanny and Ruth to nothing. Thank God if you've come back, but you've come back empty.

The whole point of this story, though, it was true. She came back empty. She didn't remain empty.

That's the story. How the empty became full. Ruth, too, came back empty.

She didn't remain empty because their back home was their nearest kinsman. They'd almost forgotten there was this gracious provision. It never occurred to Nanny that Boaz was a kinsman who had the right to redeem.

I went out full. I've come back empty. But she didn't remain empty.

And you're not going to remain empty. You, in coming back as an empty sinner, you, in coming back where the man says, I'm all wrong, I'm the one to blame, you become a candidate. The disgraceful provision of one who has the right to redeem, to restore, and to do it in the grandest style possible.

There's nothing too hard for Jesus. There's nothing that he cannot do. On condition the one in the middle of the situation says, I'm all wrong.

He says, that's just fine. You've come back. You've come back empty.

But your very emptiness is your qualification for me. And really, this very condition that Nanny lamented over her--did she but know it, she didn't yet know it--made her a fit candidate to apply to her nearest kinsman. This is the first chapter of the story.

Beautiful. Cover me because thou art my nearest kinsman. We should think about this nearest kinsman tomorrow.

Beautiful. But you've come back empty, but you're not going to remain it. I'm going to say one last thing about Ruth, because this is mainly, as I've said, about Nanny.

But Ruth's going to be the principal character. I almost wept when I was reading the story of Ruth, making the choice she did. I mean to say it was a choice.

I mean to say what link is there between a woman and her daughter-in-law when the son's gone? It isn't a blood link at all. The daughter-in-law, needn't of necessity feel she's got any legal obligation. A son, yes, but a daughter-in-law, another family, in this case another race.

And Nanny recognizes, oh, I don't expect you to come with me. Let me go on my way of sorrows on my own. And Orpah returned, and Nanny didn't blame her.

Go, you need a--I can't provide you a husband, and I don't know what the world's going to have when you come back to this alien, exclusive race of Israel, a Gentile. Nay, my daughters, it grieveth me much for

your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone against you. You go back.

But Ruth made another choice, a choice that transcended ties of blood. It was a tremendous choice. She was leaving her own land, her own culture, her own home, and her own gods for a strange people, whose ways she did not know, doubtful perhaps as to her welcome.

But she'd made her choice. Where thou goest, I will go. Thy people shall be my people.

Ah, listen. And thy God, my God, do you know she was converted? If that isn't an Old Testament conversion, tell me what is, when a Gentile says to a Hebrew, thy God shall be my God. One of these days when I have a chance, I love to preach on some of the great Old Testament conversions.

Naaman's a case in point. Nebuchadnezzar a case in point. And I'm going to include Ruth on Old Testament conversion.

Thy God shall be my God. Now this is extraordinary, because all she'd known and seen of Nehemiah's God was him humbling her, his hand going out against her, dealing bitterly with her, first occasioning one loss, then another loss. This wasn't much to attract this Gentile girl to Nehemiah's God, and perhaps that is what Nehemiah meant when it says, it grieves me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against you.

Frankly, I believe she'd hoped for their conversion. She'd hoped that when they saw how good Jehovah was, they'd want Jehovah to be their God. But when all they saw was Jehovah humbling her in this painful way, she said well that's going to put them off for life, and it grieves me much for your sakes.

I'd hoped for something different, that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. And yet, Ruth said, there be, thy God's going to be my God. Whatever was it she saw in Nehemiah's God.

I tell you, she saw Nehemiah repenting. And I imagine, although she was far from home, and still weeping, getting peace in her tears, with that God before whom she was making her confession. If a man repents, it implies that the one towards whom he repents is merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, quick to have mercy, ready to pardon.

And as she saw Nehemiah humbling herself, she saw the shadow of Jehovah as he really was, a merciful and gracious God. Merciful art thou when sin is caused. Oh, she said, that's different.

I didn't think Nehemiah's God was that. And look, she said how wrong she is. She seems comforted.

This is a different God from what I thought she had. I thought Nehemiah's God was a good person's God. And as I wasn't a good person, I never qualified.

But I begin to see that Nehemiah's God is the sinner's God. I qualify that. Is he really a God for sinners? And he says, that's the sort of God.

And are there some people, are there some people who know this sort of God? I want to get amongst them. I want something of what they've seen to rub off on me. Thy God.

If it's a God like that for sinners, that's the one for me. And if there are people who know this mercy, I want to get amongst them. Thy people should be my people.

When we're in Brazil, a young American missionary, gone there to have a ministry along a specialised line of body life and so on. And God moved in our midst. And many of the saints opened their hearts one to another to the Lord.

And he heard and saw sharing at sinner's level. Why, he says, this is what I've been after. I only had the theory.

And he was so blessed to help. He said, Roy, he said, what's this conference you've occasionally spoken about where you learn these things together in England? Do you think, do you think I can come? Because I have a sort of feeling that your God needs to be my God. And if there are people around who are learning these things, I want to come, even if necessary, as far as Brazil.

I said you can go as far as that. You can go to the cross here. But when you're going on furlough and he's going a few days, I can tell you in your own land.

And they know this way. They know the blessedness of going to the cross. They know this God is the sinner's God and they know how to take a sinner's place.

And that it was, I believe, that made Ruth, whose name is God. By the way, be sure that when you give a testimony, it's a sinner's testimony. It's hard to give it.

It doesn't show you up in a good light. You have to admit that you haven't been all, all smiling on the inside at all. Things have been wrong.

Share it when you've got peace about it. Share it. Because up to now, other people have thought that your God was the good person's God, that you were a very good person.

You'd be nothing of the sort. When we give a sinner's testimony, we give glory to a sinner's God and to the sinner's savior, his beloved son. And people say, well, that's the sort of God for me.

I can get by with that sort of God. And so it was, nearly. With Ruth came back empty.

But the sequel will show they did not remain empty. Ruth, this gentile, became a princess in Israel and an ancestress of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a story.

Quite extraordinary. Altogether beautiful. If it doesn't do your heart good, well, I don't know what will.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, and thou God and father of our Lord Jesus, we thank thee for being the sinner's God. We thank thee for having mercy on an enemy.

And though you bring us home by the hard way sometimes, and bring us home empty, Lord, we want to thank you we don't remain empty. But you know how to fill the hungry with good things, the empty ones. And we ask, Lord, that thou would make us excited as we begin to see thee, Lord Jesus, as our nearest kinsman.

And help us to respond as Ruth did, and call on thee to take us over, and take us on, and bail us out. Which it is thy joy to do, for thy dear name's sake. Amen.

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