Good morning. For the next few weeks, we are going to dive into the Book of Ruth. Ruth has been called “the greatest short story ever written.” It’s so much more than a love story. It is a picture of how God’s purpose interacts with human decision-making, of how God develops people of character as He displays His lovingkindness, of Got at work in the darkest of times, of His sovereignty and providence. Ruth 1:1 tells us this set of events took place during the time of the judges, a four-hundred-year period after Israel has entered the Promised Land and before there were kings in Israel. Judges 21:25 tells us this about the times in which Naomi and Ruth’s story takes place: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.” This observation gives us a true idea of what is going on. We are told that there is a famine in the land, but we need to think of that not only in terms of food and finances but also in terms of spiritual emptiness of society. The Book of ruth gives us a glimpse of the hidden work of God during difficult times. In this story, God lays foundation for a future in which the world will see “Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David” Ruth 4:22, and “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10). In other words, the Ruth story lays the foundation for the coming of Jesus Christ. The actors in this tale can have no idea about their part in the lineage of the Messiah! Knowing this, we face this question: How does each of us represent God in our lives, even in difficult times? The mournful and bitter Naomi asks her two daughters-in-law, “would you wait until they [more possible sons of hers] grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!” (Ruth 1:13), and she tells them,

“Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 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 1:20-21)

In Hebrew, Naomi means “pleasant”; Mara means “bitter. She has lost her husband and her sons. Famine has not only affected her land but has infected her soul. She cannot see the sovereignty of God. The famine has blinded her to her own theology, her own belief. She knows the Almighty and refers to Him as Almighty, but in her bitterness, she forgets that He has begun to bring relief to the starving. He is ending the famine and making a way home for her.

Christian, there is nothing for us in bitterness. It leaves us impoverish. It takes root, and where there is root, there will be fruit. But bitterness is not a fruit of the spirit. In verse 20, the word Naomi uses for God, “Almighty,” translates to “the sufficient one.” Her bitterness blinds her to the truth she knows. For her—and for us--bitterness results in ungratefulness. It robs us of our worship and is a clever liar. Christian, bitterness goes when we decide to let it go. Paul writes, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). As well, believers should “see to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15). Yes, we should throw off the weight of bitterness and walk again in the freedom of the grace of God. Bitterness seeks destruction, leaving the believer in a spiritual famine. Christ sets us free. Trust the sovereign goodness and mercy of God to pursue you all the days of your life.

Let’s take a look at Ruth’s example:

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

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. 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.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. (Ruth1:15-18)

Here we read of radical commitment. Do you also hear the freedom? Ruth chooses to be loyal to Naomi. More, Ruth says that she chooses to be faithful to the God to whom Naomi has introduced her, the God Ruth has seen working in Naomi’s life. Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi even in Naomi’s crisis of faith. In a time of moral chaos and national instability, Ruth choses loyalty. In her proclamation of verses 16-18, Ruth says, “I’m determined to live this life. I don’t know what God has planned, but I will not return to a land of false gods.” She chooses loyalty. Here we see God developing character, interacting with human decision-making as He displays His lovingkindness.

Listen, Family. Ruth is not the main character in this book. God in all his sufficiency, sovereignty, and grace—He is the main character. His merciful purpose governs the affairs of nations, of families, of individuals:

6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;

he is my fortress; I will not be shaken.

7 My salvation and my honor depend on God[a];

he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

8 Trust in him at all times, you people;

pour out your hearts to him,

for God is our refuge. Psalm 62:6-8

We can choose loyalty to Him because we trust His loyalty toward us. Church, be reminded this morning just who God is:

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. (Ruth 1:6-7)

Naomi gets up to leave the “foreign, pagan land” to return home, and she and Ruth come to Bethlehem “at the time of the harvest” (Ruth 1:22). We see here a picture of repentance and restoration, a season of renewal and provision. And God calls us to

this same place of hope in difficult times, bread in spiritual famine. That’s the Gospel—the beginning of a story of redemption, of transformation . Ruth and Naomi’s story shows believers embracing new beginnings, trusting in God’s provision, even after loss and famine. God in His loyalty and sufficiency provides. Here we read of faith in adversity—faith persisting without any understanding of what God’s ultimate purpose may be. This story of Naomi and Ruth is a story of the beginning of hope. All of us go through seasons of spiritual famine. The lesson here is that we must keep worshipping, remain steadfast, return home, and persist in loyalty. Whether we can see it or understand it, God in His sovereignty is working.

Passages in support of this sermon:

Ruth 1:14-22

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

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.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 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?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi,[a]” she told them. “Call me Mara,[b] because the Almighty[c] has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted[d] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Psalm 62:6-8

6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;

he is my fortress; I will not be shaken.

7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;

he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

8 Trust in him at all times, you people;

pour out your hearts to him,

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