

At the Crossroads

Text: Ruth 1.6–22

Theme: God's grace brings each of us to a turning point where we must decide what we will do

Introduction —A Tale of Three Widows

- this is what we have in Ruth chapter 1
- no living man in chapter 1
- you might say, “Wait, there’s Elimelech...oh, no; he died.”
- “But wait a moment, there’s the two so...oh, no; they died too.”
- this chapter is the tale of three widows
- but written large over it all is the tale of God’s grace, His lovingkindness
- for that’s the song of Ruth...
- God’s lovingkindness, even when it appears unseen, never ceases to act on behalf of His children no matter their circumstances.

God writes the principles of His grace in large letters in the lives of His children

- think of context: time of the judges, v. 1
- here is God providing salvation in midst of the nations
- here also: God focuses in upon one particular family
- God’s grace written upon nation of Israel’s life, AND that of a single family
- and even in the lives of individuals

Ruth begins in tragedy and ends in glory

- storyteller: holds off on telling us significance until very end of book
- overlook if you hurry on: Ruth 4.22, where we read...
- Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David
- and then N.T. in Matthew opens with this very truth and key blessing
- King David’s greater son, Jesus Christ
- in the lineage of David, and Jesse and Obed, and Boaz & Ruth is Jesus
- what begins so darkly here in ch. 1, ends gloriously in ch. 4
- this is because God’s lovingkindness, even when it appears unseen, never ceases to act on behalf of His children no matter their circumstances.

Tale of Three Widows

- there is an obvious key thought: verb used v. 6–22, eleven times!
- English different, but Hebrew, 11x
- idea of “turning”
- going back, turning back, returning
- passage, then, is about turning
- as story unfolds, becomes more obvious, even as they prepare to head back to Bethlehem
- three women come to a crossroad
- somewhere between Moab and Bethlehem, some geographical location, decision must be made
- they come to a crossroads, a point of decision
- author intends us to understand this crossroad is single great turning event in their lives
- so what we see in this portion of our story, and like the second refrain in the marvelous song
- God’s grace brings each of us to a turning point where we must decide what we will do

The first turning point we see comes as we look to Naomi, who finds herself at...

I. THE TURNING POINT OF RESTORATION

- Naomi is chief focus at this point
- here is her turning point: turning point of restoration

1. From darkness into light

- consider 1.1–5 and all that has happened, seemingly “against” her
- most of us would never have dared to interpret her experience and faith...
- “Naomi, let me tell you what is the meaning of your life right now”
- this would never do
- especially considering what Naomi says to them about this
- Naomi’s words: v. 21— “I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty”
- perhaps not full in all of wealth and such
- but her life had a husband and sons, promise and hope of a future, but now “nothing”
- women of Bethlehem, astonished both by Moabitess and story
- don’t call me Naomi, call me Mara—Pleasant into Bitter
- this is Naomi’s interpretation of her experience
- “The Lord has made my life very bitter”
- calamity, she calls it, in v. 21
- Naomi: blaming God for her bitterness
- not wrong: He had, for He is sovereign over all things; even the evil that befalls us
- but He had brought her back!
- how so, you ask? Look at what she heard, given us in v. 6
- “...for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food”
- this is key: God brought her back, He brings her to turning point in her life
- and Naomi had a sense that it was the Lord who brought her back
- now remember our song for this short book
- God’s lovingkindness, even when it appears unseen, never ceases to act on behalf of His children no matter their circumstances
- God used the dark days of her life to help her see the light on the horizon
- turning point comes in v. 6: the Lord has visited His people;
- Bethlehem—house of bread now has bread!
- God comes and visits His people and brings His blessing
- this bread was a sign of God’s blessing
- she was brought to long for blessing

2. A clear pattern

- this is a pattern in Bible, later on, in the Gospel accounts of the New Testament
- there we read of a young man who went into far country, full
- then found himself empty; without bread, without food, and he came to himself
- realized bread in his father’s house
- I’ll arise and go and plead forgiveness and ask to be just a servant, hired servant
- as long as I can have bread, and be like a hireling in my father’s house, I’ll be fine
- pattern of Jesus: show it’s possible for those who have been claimed by God’s mercy...
- who have been within walls of His blessing; tasted of His goodness...
- even they find themselves in far country, far away from blessing, broken and desolate...
- hear that there is blessing to be found in Father’s house, bread in Bethlehem
- Naomi’s life & prodigal son: I’ll never be what I was, but I can be servant in His house
- but even that will be enough

- son comes home, father grasps him; son couldn't understand how this could be
- perhaps Naomi can't take it in either, Naomi into Mara; pleasantness into bitterness
- yet, even though soaked in bitterness, it is the Lord who has brought her back
- crossroads have become turning to restoration

3. Given to us for our learning: are some of you at this crossroads?

- your life seems bitter, too hard to even bear up under
- wonder, ask God, "Why? Why have You dealt bitterly with me?"
- are you still in that far country?
- but now Word of God comes to you and turns to where you are
- you are at the crossroads: will you turn to restoration?
- He is seeking to awaken you to the blessings of salvation once again
- the crossroads can be your restoration beginning

Focus now turns to the two daughters-in-law, and first of all to Orpah, who faces...

II. THE TURNING POINT OF REJECTION

- like Naomi, she too faces a crossroads
- easy for us to look down noses upon Orpah
- think of actress: one who look suspicious from the start

1. Impression of Orpah here, however

- she is, humanly speaking, everything that a mother-in-law could desire
- v. 8: may the Lord show kindness to you, His *hesed*, his covenant love & mercy
- you have shown this to your dead husband
- and you've done this to me as well!
- here is Naomi, praying for this young woman, for how Orpah has treated her
- like a model daughter-in-law, from human perspective

2. On a human level

- woman, far from place of God's grace
- far from where the ordinances of God's grace were carried out
- Orpah had heard Naomi tell how God's judgment had been against His people
- but now, Naomi is on verge of being restored & seeks God's grace again
- yet as Naomi begins the restoration, Orpah is at a different point

3. Another pattern is seen

- Orpah: I'll come with you!
- but sounds like another pattern in Scripture, does it not?
- rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks him if he can follow Him
- he says, "I'll come with you; I'll follow you"
- "just tell me what I need to do to have eternal life"
- Jesus presses upon this man's heart about the cost of discipleship
- it is unfolded and the young man cannot bear it
- rich young ruler wants eternal life — cost free
- now we begin to see Orpah's hesitation
- see how Naomi zeroes in to the needs and longings of this young woman
- I really have nothing to offer you if you come with me, back to my home
- to not have husband was to have no protection, no honor, no resources, no future
- the cost is too high for Orpah

- she kisses Naomi and heads back to her mother's home

4. Hands full

- Orpah's hands were full of what she wanted out of this life
- this is not a bargaining situation for her, like the rich young ruler
- "does not having a husband qualify you for eternal life?"
- no, for it is not possible for you take hold of God's grace and salvation with both hands
- AND at same time, hold tightly to anything we count precious in this world
- perhaps you've heard the old definition of what faith is
- FAITH = forsaking all, I take Him
- must come with empty hands, open hands
- the tightness of your grip on all and everything in this world you hold dear must be done
- too much for Orpah: this world's formula didn't add up for her
- she couldn't not comprehend the loss of self in order to gain her true self
- so, here she is: crossroads
- did she find a home, another husband, a new life?
- we don't know, but we know this: for her, like rich young ruler, a turning point of rejection
- Jesus' words: what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?
- this is the story of Orpah
- is it yours?
- I pray it is not, at least, that you've come to this crossroads and turned down the wrong path
- if you're here, though, know this: if you reject God's grace for the world's offerings, that rejection cuts you off
- I plead with you: don't take that turn

The spotlight now turns to focus upon Ruth, who finds herself at...

III. THE TURNING POINT OF REDEMPTION

- central figure of the whole book, which bears her name
- this is Ruth's turning point of conversion, of her redemption
- it's told to us in 2.11–12
- this man who enters the picture does so briefly at first
- v. 11
- then v. 12: the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge

1. Another pattern

- Jesus looks over Jerusalem: longing to bring them under His wings for salvation
- used elsewhere in O.T.: come under the protection of God's wings
- **"He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler."** (Psalm 91:4 ESV)
- or during the Exodus, God reminds Israel
- **"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."** (Exodus 19:4 ESV)
- this is salvation; this is God's deliverance; this is His covenant *hesed*, His lovingkindness

2. Ruth's redemption

- this is seen in 1.16–17 even before Boaz mentions it in 2.12
- far more than human devotion and commitment
- when you hear Ruth's words, don't focus on beginning or even the end, look at the middle
- "your God will be my God and your people will be my people"

- OT: these words should be familiar
- God tells Israel: “I will be your God and you will be My people”
- this is His saving covenant, coming out of His *hesed*, His mercy and lovingkindness
- hear Naomi, once again saying: count the cost, girl
- and Ruth says: wait! I’ve been saved! I’ve been converted! I’ve been redeemed
- your God will be my God and your people my people
- sounds like Paul regarding Thessalonians, speaking about their salvation
- describes it: “[you] turned from idols to God to serve the living and true God”
- marks of genuine conversion to the Lord are here
- Ruth comes unreservedly
- she tells Naomi she comes without conditions, empty-handed
- she comes to God, in His lovingkindness, to be His alone and forever
- even until she dies and is buried with God’s people

3. Yet one more pattern here

- Orpah: like rich young ruler who rejects Jesus’ offer of salvation
- even though it was free, it’s cost was too high for her
- for Ruth, great biblical pattern of barren woman who ends up bearing glorious fruit
- Ruth is so remarkable in telling us of promise of Lord
- no one who comes into His kingdom, leaving behind all worldly blessing...
- without receiving 100-fold in this world and in the world to come, eternal life
- there is Christ’s equation: nothing, but with Christ, is everything
- in case of Ruth, all that has dropped from her hands before God, has future blessing all over it
- she is restored, redeemed, and then multiplied
- the crossroads for Ruth are the turning point of redemption

Conclusion — Consider means God used to bring her

- work He began in someone else’s life, in Naomi’s life, draws Ruth to Himself
- Ruth saw what God was doing, even now, in Naomi’s life as restoration begins
- she realizes this is what she needs, what she must have, what she wants and longs for
- you have seen what God is doing thru those who have have bitter experiences in life
- you see them, hear them, realize that perhaps God’s hand has dealt bitterly with them
- but they know, they are assured of His restoration, of His blessing
- He is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God—He will surely do it!
- Ruth sees that God had visited Bethlehem and blessed it with bread
- we can see the pattern, can’t we
- greatest pattern of them all
- God, who visited Bethlehem to provide bread and food, has fulfilled in Jesus, the babe born in Bethlehem and crucified on Calvary, the bread of life, broken for the sins of the world
- the fountain of life opened for the forgiveness of our sins
- what God began in Bethlehem to bring Naomi back and Ruth to Himself...
- what He did there so perfectly even then in Jesus Christ, the descendant of Ruth’s great-grandson, David...
- He can do for you today
- we might come to the crossroads, the turning point of our life to find grace, blessing, salvation

Which of these characters do you identify with?

- He has been working to restore you
- He had been working to bring you to point of decision

- do not make it point of rejection
- but see in grace of God displayed in Naomi and Ruth
- see the Bread of Life born in Bethlehem
- the grace, mercy freely offered
- have FAITH = forsaking all, I take Him