

Ruth 1:1-22 // Hope in the Lord

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[0:00] Our Bible reading this morning is taken from Ruth chapter 1, which is on page 267 in the pew bibles. The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion.

They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her two sons.

They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about 10 years, both Malon and Kilion also died.

And Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. 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.

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. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

[1:39] May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, We will go back with you to your people. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters.

Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters. I am too old to have another husband.

Even if I thought there was still hope for me, even if I had a husband tonight and then give birth to sons, would you wait until they 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. At this they wept aloud again.

[2:36] Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. Luke 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. 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?

Naomi? 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.

[3:45] Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you very much, Andy. Here we go. Ruth one. How exciting. It would be really helpful for me if you have bad eyesight, if you want to come down the front.

Basically, I'm going to retell the story of Ruth in a few minutes, but I'm going to use these boards. And I don't understand scale and distance very well. So if you are young and you want to come

down the front, please do.

Anyone aged zero to 100, you're welcome. This is very small text, and it will be hard to see if you're at the back. So please do come. So we have Israel, and we have Moab. Come on down. Don't be afraid.

The first person will do it, and then everyone else will come. See, Rachel's already here. It's great. Let me get all my props set up. Okay, here we go.

[5:00] I should be ready now. There we go. Thank you. Excellent. Right, great. Great little group. I've got my props, and everyone else is sitting here watching. So for those who didn't hear when Martin was talking, my name is Robbie.

My job is I work here at St. Silas. I'm the youth pastor in training. I do all the kids' work and the youth work. Now, it's important that I tell you that because names have meaning. Names are really important.

Names tell us about people. Names give us identity. Your parents all chose your names. You know, I have a name. You have a name. Everyone here has a name. Places have names. You know, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness.

They all have names behind those names. Why are they called that? They all have meanings. Even random things. So my name's Robbie. I have a name. Even, look, all of you here, apart from you guys in the front, are sitting on chairs.

Does anyone know why a chair is called a chair? I didn't until I Googled it. The word chair comes from a French word called chair. Now, the French word chair is from the Latin word cathedra.

[6:00] The Latin word cathedra also brings out cathedral words, but it comes from a combination of two words, one that means sit and one that means down. So sit and down. Because a cathedral, which is where the bishop, you know, the head of the church would sit.

There was a seat. The bishop's seat was at the cathedral. So cathedral, chair, chair. Who knew? I didn't until this week. It's just wild. So names matter. Names tell us things about the things that they're describing.

Now, my name is Robbie, or formally you might want to call me Robert. My parents chose that name for me when I was younger. And I found out that the name Robert in Old Norse means bright star or fame.

Bright star or fame. Clearly, mum and dad had really high hopes for me. And it didn't pay off because I'm only here and not standing at Hampden or something. Or Martin.

Martin, our minister, is leading the service. Martin comes, it means of war. It comes from the Latin god Mars. So Martian, Martin, it's the same thing.

[7:04] And if you know Martin, it makes total sense. Our staff meetings are a nightmare. I'm only kidding. I'm only kidding. And it's a bunch of other things. Who else have we got? I have some names here. Rachel, what does your name mean?

Rachel means, it means you, a baby sheep. That's Hebrew. Who else have we got here? Amelia. Amelia means industriousness in Latin. So clearly your mum and dad want you to work hard.

Or they just think it's a nice name, which it is. Don't worry. So names mean something. Names mean something. It's true in the Bible. When we see a name, especially in these Old Testament stories, it can be really helpful to think, wait, what do these names mean?

What do these names add to the story that I'm reading? Parents often chose a name to send a message. If we think back to the name Isaac, Abraham and Sarah named their son Isaac because Isaac means the one who laughs.

And they chose that name because Sarah laughed when God said you were going to have a son. So if you're reading a story in the Old Testament and you see a name, think, well, what does that name mean? And how is it going to help? It might just help our story become clearer.

[8:09] And I think that's the case today. We had Andy, he really well read, didn't he? It was a nice long story. But there's a whole bunch of names in it. In fact, there are six different names in this chapter and two place names.

And as we read it through, the writer really emphasizes those place names and people names. He says them a lot. In the first five verses, we get the place name Moab five times. So that's Moab on my left.

And we get the place name Israel or Bethlehem or Judah five times. That's over here. That's Israel. So it's clearly very important where these things are happening and who they're happening to. So that's why I have my lovely big boards. It means I can show you who is going where and where they are at each part of the story because that really matters. So we have Israel. And at the start of our story, we have two people.

It's also up here if you do have bad eyesight. Don't worry. So the start of our story, we have two people. We have Elimelech and we have Naomi.

[9:07] So I have Elimelech and I have Naomi. And they start the story off in Israel. Catherine, can you come be my hands? That would be really helpful. So I don't have to fumble about all the time.

So we have Naomi. If you could put Elimelech up beside her. That would be great. Thank you, Catherine. We didn't plan that. I thought I was going to be way better at this than I am. So Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, and they have sons, Kilion and Malon.

I'm going to just give you everything. And now all of these names have meanings. So Naomi, her name means pleasantness. It's quite a nice name.

It means, you know, nice times. And well, you know, Naomi and Elimelech, they had their sons. And they were living in Israel. And there was lots of food. And they were probably having quite nice times. Well, and Elimelech, well, his name means God is king.

That's a fascinating name. God is king. But when we read through the first chapter of Ruth, early on it says, in the time of the judges in Israel. Now, in the time of the judges, there wasn't a king in Israel.

[10:13] They didn't have a king. The judges led them. So the fact that he's called God is king, it's quite a good sign. It means Elimelech's mom and dad knew who God was. And they knew that they needed to follow him like he was their king.

So they named their son God is king. But anyway, so that's Naomi and Elimelech. And this small family were living their life in Israel. And it was all going very well. But suddenly a famine happened. Now a famine, if you don't know, is where all the food ran out. So I'm going to remove the food from Israel. There was no food in Israel. They couldn't feed themselves. They couldn't eat.

They were very, very hungry. And then when the food started to run out, well, Naomi and Elimelech, they decided they needed to leave their home in Bethlehem. Place name alert.

Bethlehem means the house of bread. Would love to live there. But they decided, we don't want to live in the house of bread anymore because there is none. We need to move to Moab. Thank you very much, Catherine.

[11:16] So it's not just that it's a house of bread that matters about Israel. Place names matter. Naomi and Elimelech live in God's promised lands. Israel is God's promised lands.

God had given it to Israel and he promised that he was going to look after them as long as they were in the land living under his rule. But this family, they didn't look to God and trust that his promises were going to come true.

They didn't look to the promised land and think, well, God's going to keep all of his other promises. Elimelech and the family didn't trust that God was going to feed them. Instead, they looked around and saw, well, there's no food here.

No food is coming. We need to run to Moab where there's lots of foods. So they moved to Moab. Now, just like Israel rings like nice, it's like a nice name. Israel is good.

Moab is bad. In the Bible, anything that happens in Moab in the first little bit, it's really bad. They do lots of bad things. They were people who didn't love God. They didn't follow God.

[12:16] In fact, the people from Moab, they were against God. They tried to tempt Israel away from following God. So at first, the move by the family was, it made some sense, didn't it?

Well, there's no food in Israel. There is food in Moab. We'll move. And early on, it makes it sound like they're just going to get some food. It'll be temporary. But this short jaunt to get some dinner

turns into a long stay.

It's 10 years they spend in Moab. And not only do they move for 10 years, they actually marry, they marry their sons to two Moabite women. So if you're sitting down the front, you'll notice that Malon is actually Mallow.

I cut off the end by mistake. It's my mistake. So Ruth and Orpah marry Malon and Kilion. And as we're on the name train for this whole talk, it's worth thinking about what do Malon and Kilion mean?

Don't call your kids Malon and Kilion. Malon and Kilion means sickness and destruction. Death and illness is what their names mean. It'd be very weird if that's what we called our kids, isn't it?

[13:27] We also see that with our names, Ruth. Ruth means compassionate friends. So it's another name that seems pretty apt to our story. Ruth becomes a very compassionate friend to Naomi.

Now, slight warning, we're on the name train, but it's good to remember that sometimes names don't add to our story, so we don't want to dig too deep into every name just in case we get some magical meaning. Case in point, Orpah, our second Moabite wife.

Orpah means neck. Maybe she had a long neck when she was a baby. I don't think it adds to our story. So just a side warning, we don't need to remember every single name.

So, we have our small family in Moab with the food. They've been there for 10 years and the family's gotten slightly bigger. The sons have married. Everything seems good in Moab.

Naomi's having a good time. Pleasantness is surrounding her. But suddenly, everything starts to go wrong. Suddenly, Elimelech died and Naomi's left without her husband.

[14:33] Then, not long after that, Kilion and Malon died. Ruth and Orpah are left without their husbands. All of a sudden, this loving, pleasant family have become three widows in Moab.

Naomi left in a foreign land with no family to support her, no one to work and earn for her. Being a widow back in these times was really, really hard.

No one was going to help them out because people thought of widows as weak. If they weren't in their own family, they weren't going to provide for them. But in this dark and difficult time, Naomi hears that God has provided food for Israel.

Thank you, Catherine. So we're going to add food back to Israel because all of a sudden, God has rescued his people. He's provided food for them all who are in Israel. After all that time, God has done what he promised to do.

When she heard this, Naomi knew she had to leave Moab. She had to go back home to the place where she was from. There was food there now and people to care for her. So they packed their bags, they left Moab, but as they're on the road home in the crossroads, they had a bit of a conversation.

[15:54] So they had left Moab, so Moab was gone. We'll move this out of the way. They're in the middle, they're not yet in Israel. They're standing in the middle, thank you, Catherine. And Naomi turns to Ruth and Orpah and she says, Ruth, Orpah, you need to go back to Moab.

Naomi tells them to go home. She thanks them for all the loving kindness they've showed her. Ruth and Orpah would have cared for Naomi when she needed it. They were provided until their husbands died.

And so Naomi says, I hope God shows you the kindness you've shown me, but go home. These women cared for Naomi enough to pack up and follow her to a foreign land.

From their home, Moab, they were willing to go to Israel. But Naomi makes it clear, it is not going to be good for you in Israel. Naomi won't be able to get them more husbands.

She won't be able to provide for them. To choose to go to Israel for them would be really dangerous. It would be difficult. The world says, no, go and find a husband in Moab with your own family.

[16:54] It was emotionally sad. All of them were crying. They didn't want to leave each other. They were weeping over the loss of their husbands, their homes, their whole lives.

But Orpah hears what Naomi says, so I'll take Orpah. And Orpah says, Naomi, you're right. It'll be better for me if I go back to Moab because my family are there and it's safe there.

So Orpah goes home to Moab. Orpah sees what Naomi says is true and goes. So much like Naomi and Elimelech did 10 years earlier, Orpah sees that Moab offers a better chance than Israel did. And so she goes because it seems to make the most sense. Ruth though, Ruth, Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi. She doesn't just stay, she clings to Naomi. She holds on to her and says, Naomi, I'm never leaving you.

Despite Naomi's best effort to make Ruth see reason, Ruth's like, no, I am coming with you. Why does she do that? Well, in the short term, Ruth gains nothing from this move.

[18:02] In Israel, she's still going to be a widow. She's still going to be hungry. She's still going to have to do something for foods in a world that is dangerous for women without a husband. She'll have to care for Naomi because Naomi's probably getting older at this point.

Ruth could have gone home to her family, to a potential new husband, to be cared for, but instead she says that she's going to leave it all behind to go to a foreign land with Naomi. And she doesn't just say that, she says she'll make Naomi's people her people.

She'll make Naomi's God her God. Ruth trusts that Naomi has someone to look after her, that someone will be there to care for her. And so, they return to God's promised lands.

We started this whole thing thinking about names. And it's upon the return to Israel, Naomi decides to change her name. The fact, in the years past, all the women in Israel were like, can that really be Naomi?

Ten years have passed. Hands up down the front, hands up who's younger than ten? Most, most of you. So, your whole life would have passed. Hands up if anyone is ten?

[19:13] Beth, you're ten. So, this, in this, this whole story has happened in your whole lifetime. That's how long, imagine how much younger your parents looked before you were all born. That's how much, how different Naomi looks.

And Naomi says, you know what, I have changed. Don't call me that anymore. Life is no longer pleasant, but life is bitter. Call me Mara. Because Mara means bitterness.

Naomi cries out, you can't call me pleasantness anymore because life is not pleasant. God has made my life bitter and hard. So, call me Mara. It's what Mara felt at the time.

She felt like God had left her. God had caused her desolation. Her husbands had died. Her home in Moab of ten years, well, she had to leave it.

She was suffering, she was grieving, and even her sons died. Everything was gone. When she left Israel, Naomi says, or Mara says, she was full.

[20:15] Her family was full, and now she returns empty with nothing. This is where our story ends. It's quite sad, isn't it?

There's no happy ending in this bit. It can be summarized in that one name change, Naomi to Mara, pleasantness to bitter. It seems very dark, but there is one bright glimpse of hope right at the end, so don't think this is all going to end badly.

I'm here to tell you that, kids, you might not be here next week, but adults, it's going to get up. Trust me, this is getting better. It ends with that last verse, and it says, to paraphrase it, so God brought Naomi and Ruth back to Israel at the beginning of the harvest.

That can sound like a bit of a summary. It's just what's happened. It's just the end. They're back in Israel, and it's the harvest time. What a coincidence, but that's not what's going on. The harvest time in Israel is the best time to be in Israel if you're a widow or if you're poor.

You see, there was a law, a rule that meant if you're a widow and it was harvest time, you're allowed to go and pick all the food up off the floor that had fallen by itself. So this is the best possible time to be in Israel for widows.

[21:34] There is food, there is work, there is things to do, and the people are going to care for them because they have to. So this last, I don't want you to think this last verse is a coincidence. It's not.

This last verse is the hope that God brings Naomi and Ruth back for. He doesn't just leave them in their sadness, in their grief. He brings them back for something more.

The chapter seems very dark and very tragic, but from the embers of this sad, dying fire, God is fulfilling all his promises. Through this story, God is raising up a king and even in the dark times, even today, if you're in one of the darkest times, we can still sing that God fulfills his promises

timelines that we give him. The work God does on a scale way bigger than that. You see for Naomi she looks back over 10 years and even she sees that well nothing's happened. It's 10 years. The movement God is doing here is 28 generations worth. She doesn't see it. She doesn't see that God was moving but he was. We don't see that God is moving but he is. God's story takes place over thousands of years from Adam till Jesus now. And we need to keep that time frame in mind to continue as Christians. God is sovereign over everything Naomi went through and he never left. Maybe some of you were with us on Wednesday night. We had the Dalrymples, one of our mission partners with us. So such an encouraging evening.

They've been working in Southeast Asia for nine years. Nine years they've been there and they have seen no major breakthrough in their work in nine years. In fact what Graham told us is that in their specific country in Southeast Asia they've been the organization have been there for 70 years. That's more than most of us have been alive. Not just you guys at the front. That's more than most of us have been alive. And yet God has still not given a major breakthrough for the work they've been putting in there. They don't know why. They pray. They work hard. They're being faithful to Jesus.

They're loving him and loving people around them. But there's been no major breakthrough in their country. It doesn't distract them. It doesn't put them off. It doesn't stop them doing the work of God in this country. Instead the Dalrymples and the other the team in Southeast Asia know that God's timeline is bigger than ours. God's timeline is bigger than 70 years. That's lifetimes.

But they trust that God is going to work in Southeast Asia. Because God promises that he will there will be fruit born from their work. Whatever that looks like. And it might not even look like what they wanted to be. Naomi didn't want it to look like her husband dying. But through that something greater happens. God is sovereign at all times in his timeline not ours. And he will never leave us. [29:32] He will never let us be alone. Even when it doesn't seem like it. So that's our first point. Our second point is that return to the God of hope. Don't stay away. So God never leaves his people behind.

Even if they run really far away. God is still with them. Even if they don't realize it. He's still with them. Naomi and Elimelech left to Moab to find food and they stayed away. Ten long years in a foreign country with all of her suffering. She was away with the Lord for a long time. But Naomi returned.

Naomi went back to Israel. The writer of Ruth really wants us to understand that Naomi returned to Israel. In this chapter there are 12 times the writer says that Naomi returned or was brought back. 12 times. It's really repetitive. You're like okay we get it. She's returning. We really get it. Come on. Just move on. But he wants us to know that returning to God is the most important thing. Because it's when she returns that hope suddenly appears. It's when she returns that it happens to be harvest time. As I said earlier. It's not just a coincidence. God is returning Naomi to Israel to give her hope. We'll hear more on all this next week. And as the story continues we'll understand more about why harvest is hope. But for now we just need to trust that it does. And that God has done that for Mara. She's clear in verse 21 that God brought her back home. God's fingerprints are all over this story. She heard he was providing for his people. How did she hear that? She was in a foreign land. Who brought that news? God sent someone to tell her. And she returns to his people. And it just happens to be the perfect time for a widow to be in Israel. Without even realizing it Naomi, now Mara, has returned to the fountain of hope and provision in her home country with her people.

[31:32] When she returns to God, something better can now come. Returning to God is the best thing that happened to Mara. It's the absolute best thing that ever happens. Even if it didn't feel that way at the time. Maybe today you feel like you've left God behind or God's left you behind. Maybe you feel tired and distant spiritually. Maybe when you read your Bible you're just like, this is a boring thing. I don't have to do this every day. Maybe when you sing on Sundays you don't feel like anything's happening. Maybe you're literally leaving God's people behind today. Maybe church is something you just kind of do when you can every so often. But you're not there every week. Maybe you've stopped going to

midweek groups. Maybe you're leaving God's people because of something that's going on. Maybe the fact you're here today worshiping with us is an absolute miracle. If you feel far away from God and hear the message of Ruth 1,

God wants you to return to him. Boys and girls, God wants you with him all the time. He doesn't ever want you to leave. You're being called back to Jesus to return to him and it might be hard and it might be painful to admit that there's something you need to return from. It will be worth it because at the moment we return, at the moment we go back to Jesus, we get the hope. Naomi had to make a physical journey.

She had to actually travel from Moab to Israel. But for us today we need to turn our hearts back. We need to return our hearts to God's. We need to look into the eyes of Jesus through the Bible and see the hope that awaits us there. And even better, for Naomi, the hope that actually was coming was 28 generations in the future. For us, it's happened. That hope we need to trust and see happened through Jesus's life. He already dies and rose again so that we can find hope and peace. Things won't get perfect. Things never will get perfect until Jesus comes back. And you know what? It will cost to return to Jesus. It will cost to be brought back. Just like it did for Ruth. Ruth gave up everything she had. But when we return, when we throw our lot in with God's people, when we throw our lot in with God, just like Ruth did, we'll see that anyone who returns to him will be with him forever.

It will be better than we can ever hope. Friends, brothers, sisters, see that God has never left you whatever you're going through. Whatever the situation is in your life, God is sovereign over it and in control. If you feel far away from him, then return. Turn to him. Turn to his word. Turn to his people. [34:27] Return to the God of hope and don't stay away. Jesus is calling you home. Let me pray before we move on to the next part. Father God, we thank you that you're a God who returns your people. We thank you that you're a God whose timeline is so much bigger than we can ever understand. Father, we pray that you will bring us back to you, that you'll give us strength to see who you are and what you've done for us. And so help us just now as we discuss and look more at some questions about what we've learned. In your holy name, Lord, amen.