

Journeys that Leave Us Empty

Ruth 1:19-22

Though the book is about Ruth, these four verses are about Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi. Once highly esteemed in Bethlehem and a woman of wealth and influence, Naomi left her country with her husband Elimelech and her two sons and go to the land of Moab. In this foreign land, Naomi lost her husband and her two sons, her money, and her property. She came back to Bethlehem with nothing but the ragged clothes on her back and a daughter-in-law (Ruth) who was as poor and destitute as she was. When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem with Ruth, as they walked down the streets, the people said, "Can *this be Naomi?*"

I. Naomi's life reminds us that the only thing constant in our lives is change – (v. 19)

The bride will soon become the widow, the groom the widower. The parent may soon be childless, or the child soon an orphan. The full and satisfied might soon become the hungry and starving. If your trust is in your circumstances; you'll soon feel distrust. "I am Yawheh, I never change" (Malachi 3:6).

A. Remember the fullness that comes from this life is soon gone.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3).

B. God Himself brings a fullness that turns this world's wisdom upside down.

"The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who had many sons pines away (I Sam. 2:4-5). Illustration of the woman at the well receiving water that would cause her never to thirst again. "The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14).

II. Naomi's life reminds us that the LORD brings us to emptiness to ultimately fill us – (v. 20-21).

"Don't call me Naomi (sweet and pleasant). Call me Mara (bitter)... I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. The Lord has afflicted me...brought misfortune upon me" (Ruth 1:20-21).

A. God is sovereign over the good and the bad.

"I make peace and create affliction I the LORD do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

B. God is sensitive to the needs of His people.

"If God causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men to crush them" (Lam. 3:32-34).

C. God is sufficient for His people at all times.

The word "Shaddai" (translated Almighty) is used twice (vs. 20 -21). The LORD Almighty is the "God who provides." The God who will supply your every need according to His riches.

III. Naomi's life reminds us that feelings come and go, but truth abides forever (v. 22).

"Call me Mara, not Naomi ... The Almighty has made my life bitter... *So Naomi returned from Moab.*"

A. When you see God's people in adversity, be kind (Eph. 4:32; Gal. 6:2).

Remember I said that most commentaries on Ruth say that Naomi and Elimelech made a mistake in leaving Bethlehem and going to Moab. Even those who bring trouble on themselves, be kind.

B. When your life is filled with bitter events, seek His grace to be content (Phil. 4:11).

Naomi's character became better because of her cup of bitterness. What does it say of Job after his afflictions? "The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former" (Job 42:10).

C. Trust in the Lord, no matter what – He never changes.

Trust the Lord who has promised you that He will "work all things for your good" (Romans 8:28). And always remember that your God always moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.