

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

## PART I

### Ruth 1:6-13

*GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AND HIS TRUTH TO US IN MANY WAYS.*

*WE OFTEN GET THE MESSAGE BUT MANY TIMES WE DON'T FOLLOW THROUGH BECAUSE WE ARE STUCK IN WORLDLY THINKING.*

## Outline

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### I. **A REAL EPIPHANY** (VS 6-7)

*God Speaks To Us Through The Bible And Experience. We Start To Find Fulfillment In Life As We Learn To Follow Through By Obeying Him.*

- A. **HEARING AND BELIEVING GOD** (6a)
  - B. **TURNING AWAY FROM SIN** (6b-7a)
  - C. **TURNING TO GOD** (7b)
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### II. **SOME NOBLE GESTURES** (VS 8-10)

*I Think That Most Of Us Really Want To Do The Right Thing.*

- A. **RELEASED FROM OBLIGATION** (8a)

B. **A MISGUIDED GESTURE** (8b-9a)

C. **NOBLE WOMEN** (9b-10)

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III. **SOME REAL MUDDLED THINKING** (VS 11-13)

*Oftentimes We Fail To Make It To Wholeness Because We Follow Worldly Advice And Then Reason Accordingly.*

A. **SOME BAD ADVICE** (11)

B. **SOME MORE BAD ADVICE** (12)

C. **A WORLDLY CONCLUSION** (13)

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IV. **EPILOGUE**

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# **THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME (PART I)**

## **RUTH 1:6-13**

Last time we were together, we said that bad decisions lead to severe consequences for both ourselves and others around us. Naomi's husband, Elimelech made a bad decision. He left God's Promised Land to live in a foreign country. While living in this country, his two sons married foreign women. Elimelech died along with his two sons. Three widows were stranded in a patriarchal system. One older widow, with her two young widowed daughter-in-laws are left with no visible means of support. Perhaps all they have is the food their husbands planted or harvested before they died.

In order for us to really wrap our minds around the book of Ruth, we must

understand our own situations. There are basically two ways of living. Either we live in submission to God or we live in submission to the world. By the way, the world is under the control of Satan. So in essence, if we are not submitted to God, then we are submitted to Satan.

My guess is that all of us here this morning pretty much know what God expects of us. However, because of rebellion, ignorance, or a combination of both, we find ourselves living in submission to Satan rather than God. We find that we have made bad decisions and rather than humble ourselves, cut our losses, and get back on track, we continue to make more bad decisions in an attempt to make these things work out.

I ended the last sermon with the story of the Prodigal Son. I emphasized the point that when he finally came to his senses and quit trying to make bad decisions work out, he headed for home because he knew "There's no place like home."

What could possibly keep us from finding our way home? One of the things that keep us from finding our way home is well meaning friends who give us bad advice. Oftentimes they are themselves confused by worldly thinking.

Friends can often be a source of confusion. When I was in seminary, when I was young, I had a few bad habits. Four of us seminarians used to get together to drink and play cards on Saturday night. One of my friends used to be the night watchman of a funeral home, very near here. He got to live in the apartment above the funeral home rent-free. Just to show you what kind of guy he was, when he went on dates, he always brought the girl flowers. They thought he was romantic, but they didn't know the flowers were leftovers from funerals.

Anyway, one night we played cards a little late and one of the guys drank a little too much. He passed out. So my friend put the guy in one of the spare coffins to sleep it off. When he came to and realized where he was lying, he was totally confused. He said, "If I'm alive, why am I in this

coffin? And if I'm dead, why do I have to go the bathroom so bad?"

My friend was not so well meaning. However, even well meaning friends can be a source of confusion that prevents us from getting back on the right track.

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Here is the main idea of this morning's message. **GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AND HIS TRUTH TO US IN MANY WAYS . WE OFTEN GET THE MESSAGE BUT MANY TIMES WE DON'T FOLLOW THROUGH BECAUSE WE ARE STUCK IN WORLDLY THINKING.** In other words, we get these flashes of insight from God. However, more times than not, it seems as if we fail to act on that insight. Instead, we allow ourselves to get stopped by mixed messages. On the one hand, God's message seems to be perfectly clear. On the other hand, the world sends us messages that appeal to our pride, vanity, and fears. Even well meaning friends can keep us from following through on God's clear message.

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## **I. A REAL EPIPHANY (VS 6-7)**

*God Speaks To Us Through The Bible And Experience.  
We Start To Find Fulfillment In Life As We Learn To Follow Through  
By Obeying Him.*

In verses 6-7, Naomi has a real epiphany. We could say that **GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE BIBLE AND EXPERIENCE. WE START TO FIND FULFILLMENT IN LIFE AS WE LEARN TO FOLLOW THROUGH BY OBEYING HIM.** Many great insights go to waste when we fail to follow through on them because we are too stubborn, proud, or scared.

### **A. HEARING AND BELIEVING GOD (6a)**

In the first half of verse 6 we see Naomi both hearing from, and believing

in, God. Most of our Bibles take the phrasing out of order. They do this to make linear sense out of it. However, in order to get you to feel the full force of this phrase, let me just try to point out some of the nuances. The phrase, "When she heard in Moab ," literally reads, "for she had heard in the fields of Moab ." I think the author wants us to imagine Naomi, and her two daughter-in-laws, Ruth and Orpah, standing in the fields trying to harvest some crops. Perhaps they knew nothing about farming. Their husbands were all dead, and now, they are trying to harvest enough food to live. While they are out in the fields, Naomi gets word, "That the LORD had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them."

I don't know how she got word. Perhaps some travelers told her; perhaps some caravans were coming from Israel and had done business with them. At any rate, Naomi had an epiphany out there in the fields. She and her family left God's land to live in a foreign land. She had thought that an easy life in Moab was better than toughing it out in Israel . That plan blew up in her face. Here she was in the fields of Moab , trying to eke out an existence while now the people in Israel were enjoying prosperity.

What's interesting about this is that God's name is now introduced to the story. And note the capital letters used to spell God's Name. This is the name Jehovah or Yahweh, whichever you prefer. It is God's covenant Name. Jehovah is the relationship name He uses with His people Israel . The time of discipline is over. The nation has repented and once again, they are in a right relationship with God.

Here is Naomi's epiphany. She is standing in the middle of a mess. She left Israel to find prosperity in Moab . And now, she is totally destitute in Moab while there is plenty back in Israel .

How many epiphanies have we had in our lives where through circumstances and the Bible, God has revealed Himself and His will to us? Let me just assume that all of us have parts of our lives where we are living outside of God's will for us. Week after week we come to church and hear God's Word read and preached. The truth may hit us during the

prayer time, during the singing, during the reading of the Word or during the sermon. All of a sudden, the light goes on and we see clearly that we are outside of God's will.

Or we can get these epiphanies through experience. We may get fired from a job, we may get in an accident, our spouse may ask for a divorce, or a friend may betray us. Most of the time, I think these epiphanies occur as a result of a combination of God's Word and our present experience.

Let me give you a common example I faced as a youth pastor. Christian teens would always ask me if it was okay to date non-Christians. I said the Bible was pretty clear on that and so I would do a Bible study. Yet, because they were "In Luv," they would almost always follow their heart and date the unbeliever. I personally have not witnessed any good outcomes from this.

One young person consistently argued with me that he didn't see anything wrong with dating non-Christian girls. And so he did. After falling "In Luv" with this girl, he started to feel God speaking to him, but he couldn't follow through with breaking up.

One night while out on a double date, can you imagine his surprise when he heard the girl in the back seat breaking up with her boyfriend because he wasn't a Christian? God clearly spoke to this young man. He heard the message loud and clear.

As the parable of the "Prodigal Son" points out, God is waiting for us to hear and obey His Word. I want to encourage all of us this morning to take note of God's messages to us through the Word, through experiences, or both. Naomi was standing in the middle of a mess when she heard about God's blessings. The question is, "How would she respond?"

## **B. TURNING AWAY FROM SIN (6b-7a)**

In the second half of verse 6 and the first half of verse 7 we see that turning away from sin is the first step. Naomi clearly believed what she heard and

the prepared to return home. Perhaps they had to gather up some food for the journey and pack up their belongings. Whatever they had to do, they got it done. I think this is the crisis point for all of us. Look at the phrase in verse 7, "She left the place where she had been living." She was living in the wrong country. She decided she would go home. The first step is being willing to leave the place she was living.

This is the crisis point because when we decide to repent, we have to commit ourselves to leaving where we are living. The text doesn't say that she sent for some food from Israel . She purposed in her heart that she would leave Moab .

Many of us find ourselves living knee-high in sewage. We want to feel better, but we are not willing to leave the place where we have been living behind. We often want to feel better, but we don't want to make the hard choices it takes to get better. Maybe it's pride. Maybe it's fear. Maybe it's just plain stubbornness. Until we are willing to leave behind all our sinful thinking, we cannot get back on track.

I don't know about you, but whatever it takes to get out of the sewage, I'm willing to do it. I hope you are too. If we don't, we end up blaming other people for our misery, when in reality, it is because we have not committed ourselves to leaving this old way of living behind.

### **C. TURNING TO GOD (7b)**

The second half of verse 7 describes turning towards God. Please don't miss the power of these two verses. Naomi heard, she prepared to return home, she left the place she had been living, and now she set out on the road that would take her back home. She was headed back to the Promised Land, to the region of Judah , to the town of Bethlehem . She was on the way back to God. She was on the way back to all the blessings God had for her. Finally, she was back on track.

Let's take a moment to think about what road we are on this morning. God has spoken to us in many ways. For the most part, we know what

He wants from us. In fact, He may be speaking to us right now. I hope that we are not trying to get better, yet not giving up the place where we have been living. God's blessings for Naomi are not to be found in Moab . God's blessings for us are not to be found in sinful and stupid behavior for us. The Hebrew word for *repentance* is *shub*, which means "to turn around". Naomi has turned around. Her back is to Moab . Her face is to Israel . They are on the road that will take them back to the land of Judah .

My hope is that all of us have our backs to this world and worldly thinking and that our faces are towards God and His way of life. I'm sure we have all had epiphanies like Naomi's. **GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE BIBLE AND EXPERIENCE. WE START TO FIND FULFILLMENT IN LIFE AS WE LEARN TO FOLLOW THROUGH BY OBEYING HIM.**

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## **II. SOME NOBLE GESTURES (VS 8-10)**

*I Think That Most Of Us Really Want To Do The Right Thing.*

The more I study through this passage, the more I admire the women in this story. In verses 8-10, we see some really noble gestures by all concerned. I'm guessing that would apply to everyone here this morning. **I THINK THAT MOST OF US REALLY WANT TO DO THE RIGHT THING.** Most of us want to think of ourselves as kind, loyal, self-sacrificing, good, decent people. And since I have known most of you for about 15 years, I would have say that you are good, kind, decent, loyal, self-sacrificing people.

### **A. RELEASED FROM OBLIGATION (8a)**

Let's start with Naomi. In the first half of verse 8, her intent is to release her daughter-in-laws from any sense of obligation. Since the ancient Middle-Eastern culture was patriarchal, it would be assumed that Ruth and

Orpah now belonged to Naomi's family. They would be obliged to stay with Naomi and care for her. I want to give Naomi the benefit of the doubt. Some commentators think that Naomi was feeling as if she would have to provide for two more people when she was forced to think about her survival alone. However, I think that Naomi's intent was to free the girls from their felt obligation to her.

## **B. A MISGUIDED GESTURE (8b-9a)**

However, as the second half of verse 8 and the first half of verse 9 demonstrate, people who are hurting often make misguided gestures. Naomi thinks she is giving these girls a gift by releasing them from their obligation to her as their mother-in-law. Her gesture is to release them and send them home to their mothers' houses. We see this story told from the women's perspective. It should have read that the women were sent back to their fathers' homes. However, we are seeing this story through the eyes of women. Please follow these phrases carefully. She prays a blessing over these two girls by invoking the name of Israel's God, Jehovah.

These blessings are loaded with religious meaning. First she prays that God show the kindness in repayment for their kindness to her. The word for *kindness* is *hesed*. It usually refers to God's love. This is one of those words that cannot be translated by one word. God made a covenant relationship with Israel. In a sense God married Himself to Israel. This word has to do with all the love expressed in the context of this intimate relationship. God is passionately in love with Israel. God is totally committed to Israel. God is intimate with Israel in a way that is different from His relationship with the rest of humanity. It is this loyal, faithful, passionate, committed love that we are talking about. It is that faithful love we sing about in the song, "*Great is Thy Faithfulness*." So Ruth is asking God to shower this extravagant, faithful, passionate, covenant love on these two girls.

Secondly she is asking God to give them rest. This word in Hebrew is

*menuah*. It is a synonym of *shabbat*. It is more than finding a place they can be fed and out of the cold. She is asking God to give them an abundant life in which they will enjoy peace, contentment, and security in this life and the next.

Those are wonderful gestures on the part of Naomi, but here is why they are so misguided. Look where she sends them to find God's blessing. She sends them back to the Moabite culture. The Moabites worshiped the idol Chemosh. People sacrificed their own children to the god Chemosh. Ruth was sending these girls back to homes that worshiped a false god. She was sending them back to culture that was antagonistic to the very God Naomi was asking to bless them. Naomi was sending these girls into a culture saturated with immorality, asking God to bless them by having them find the rest and loving-kindness of Jehovah in the house of their Moabite parents and a Moabite husband.

Do you see how absurd that sounds? It is important that we understand how misguided this love is. Moab was a place that detested Jehovah, the God of Israel. The culture and the people were all against God. And Naomi thinks she is giving this beautiful gift to her daughter-in-laws by sending them back to this culture. The best gift Naomi could give these girls would be to bring them back to the land and culture of the One True and Living God, Jehovah.

Why is this so important for us to understand? Because the world in which we live in is just like Moab. We sacrifice over one million children a year to the god of sexual immorality. Almost everything in our culture is opposite of what Jesus is all about. We get our ideas of what is romantic, good, noble, and beautiful from this world. And like Naomi, even though we have many good and noble intentions, we end up giving one another misguided advice. We often try to pray God's blessings on one another, and at the same time send one another back to look for these blessings in the world. Before we give people advice and before we try and help people, we better make sure we are not sending them back with worldly ideas to look for God's blessings. They are not there.

### C. NOBLE WOMEN (9b-10)

But it appears that Naomi is dealing with some real classy ladies. The second half of verse 9 and verse 10 describe some noble women. Let me point this out. Naomi must have been a kind and compassionate woman. These girls genuinely love her. Even though she has released them from any legal or emotional obligation, they want to stay with her. This is saying something about the character of Naomi. Not many women find this much love in a mother-in-law and I dare say not many mothers find this kind of love in their daughter-in-laws. They refuse. They don't want to leave Naomi alone. Look what they say in verse 10, "We will go back with you to your people."

Here is what is so dangerous about kind and well-liked people who give advice. Good sound theology must accompany advice. I'm not talking about Sunday School theology. I'm talking about serious theology. When these girls said, "We'll go back with you to your people," Naomi should have said, "Fine, let's go and pursue God's blessings." Instead, Naomi sends them back into a godless culture to find God's blessing. We have gotten a good look at three very noble women. And again let me say **I THINK THAT MOST OF US REALLY WANT TO DO THE RIGHT THING.**

Unfortunately, even though we want to do the right thing, we have come to let the world, not God, define what the right thing to do is. I always worry about this in my own life. I have watched enough television and movies, I have listened to enough radio, I have read enough trashy books and magazines, and I have certainly partied enough in the world to be sure that I am tainted with all sorts of defective views of what is good, honorable, and noble. We really need to dialogue and check up on one another. Because as verses 11-13 point out, we can fall prey to some real muddled thinking. In other words, **OFTENTIMES WE FAIL TO MAKE IT TO WHOLENESS BECAUSE WE FOLLOW WORLDLY ADVICE AND THEN REASON ACCORDINGLY.**

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## **III. SOME REAL MUDDLED THINKING (VS 11-13)**

*Oftentimes We Fail To Make It To Wholeness Because  
We Follow Worldly Advice And Then Reason Accordingly.*

### **A. SOME BAD ADVICE (11)**

In verse 11, Naomi gives some very bad advice and then follows it up with worldly reasoning. She says, "Return home, my daughters." Again, that's bad advice. Sure, they may go back to Moab and fall in love and get married, but they would be living away from God and His blessings. And don't miss this reasoning process as well. Please watch this because we often do this. We give people a part of the theological truth, but don't even have a clue as to the full theology. Naomi quotes the theological principle of the Levirate marriage. Under Hebrew law, if a man died before he and his wife had children, his brother would be required to take her as a wife, have sex with her, and give her children. So Naomi logically reasoned that she had no more children left. But Naomi only has half the concept in mind. As we will see later in the book of Ruth, Naomi has other relatives back in Bethlehem who could fulfill this role.

Let me give us a modern day example because I think it demonstrates this defective approach to theology and it puts women at risk. In the 70's, 80's, and 90's a very famous Christian family group went around putting on family seminars all over the United States and the world. One of the issues they would address was spousal abuse. This group advised abused women to go back to their husbands, submit to them, obey them, and forgive them. Is it biblical to submit, to obey and to forgive? Yes it is. Is it biblical to send women back into an abusive situation? Absolutely not. Jesus never tolerated the abuse of women. Do you see how dangerous this theology is? Who knows how many women and children suffered and perhaps even died by the reasoning of this misguided theology?

I can name all sorts of misguided advice people give in the areas of work, school, finances, church service and relationships. Be careful. Naomi knew God was in Israel and that was where she was headed. But through worldly reasoning and misguided theology, she recommends her beloved daughters return to Moab .

## **B. SOME MORE BAD ADVICE (12)**

But it doesn't end there. She adds some more bad advice in verse 12. Look at the first phrase in verse 12. It repeats the advice she gave in verse 11. She says again, "Return home, my daughters." And then she goes on to add to her worldly logic and misguided theology. She says, "Look, I'm too old to find another man who would be willing to marry me. And even if some miracle happened and I got married and pregnant tonight, and if another miracle took place and they were twins, and if the twins were boys, it would be at least 18 years before these boys would reach marriageable age.

And now look what she does. I'm sure this is unintentional, but she questions the character of her daughters. She says, "Would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain celibate for 18 years?" I'm thinking, knowing these girls ... maybe.

## **C. A WORLDLY CONCLUSION (13)**

Look where all this bad theology, convoluted thinking and reasoning led. In verse 13, Naomi comes to a worldly conclusion. As if to be a well reasoned philosopher she says, "Therefore, No my daughters. You cannot possibly come with me. You must return home."

The conclusion she comes to on behalf of her daughters is that they have absolutely no future and no hope with her. She uses all sorts of logic mixed with bad theology to prove her point. I can't tell you how many times I have seen parents give advice to their children based on worldly logic and bad theology. I can't begin to tell you how many times I see

Christians giving one another bad advice based on worldly logic and faulty theology. And I'm sorry to say, many times, pastors give bad advice based on worldly logic as well.

And to top this all off, Naomi comes to the wrong conclusion about God. She over dramatizes her situation. She says, "Woe is me. My life downright sucks. God's hand is against me." She is not in this mess because God is punishing her. She is in this mess because of a series of bad, worldly decisions and she is about to continue making more bad decisions. In fact, God is giving her many blessings, but she is still stuck in worldly logic. He has given her two beautiful and faithful daughter-in-laws that love her very much. They are willing to leave their homes, their families, and their friends, to go home and care for her. God has let her hear that there are blessings in Israel . She is so focused on worldly logic that she cannot begin to see all the blessings right in front of her eyes.

The rest of the book of Ruth will be a direct rebuttal of her worldly reasoning and faulty theology. I'm hoping that throughout this series on Ruth, God will correct our worldly reasoning and defective theology as well. **OFTENTIMES WE FAIL TO MAKE IT TO WHOLENESS BECAUSE WE FOLLOW WORLDLY ADVICE AND THEN REASON ACCORDINGLY.**

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## IV. EPILOGUE

All of us will face rough patches in our lives. And no doubt there will be all sorts of well meaning friends around us giving us advice based on worldly logic and incomplete theology. And further, we will tend to listen to the advice that goes along with what we want to hear rather than what we need to hear. Please be careful. **GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AND HIS TRUTH TO US IN MANY WAYS . WE OFTEN GET THE MESSAGE BUT MANY TIMES WE DON'T FOLLOW THROUGH BECAUSE WE ARE STUCK IN WORLDLY THINKING.** The truth is that we often reject friends who tell us what we

need and who don't sugar coat God's truth. We often stay away from the very people we need to hear. We need to be attuned to God's language, not worldly language. The problem is that we speak and understand worldly language too well and we don't understand God's language well enough.

I love this story the Kent Hughes tells about former Senator Paul Simon the democrat from Illinois . He says,

*"Former senator Paul Simon (D. Ill.) delighted in finding examples of trade opportunities lost because of the unwillingness of the U. S. firms to speak the language of potential customers. For example, when trying to figure out why the Chevrolet Nova wasn't selling well in Latin America , General Motors discovered that "no va" in Spanish means, "It doesn't go."*

Worldly logic and faulty theology means "no go" in the kingdom of God . Out of love Naomi has given devastating advice to her daughter-in-laws. I would advise all of us to be careful about taking advice from people who are telling us what we want to hear and start listening to people who are maybe not telling us what we want to hear, but whose advise may be more in tune with God's truth.