



Sermon Transcription • Ruth 1 (NIV)

Behind a Frowning Providence

Pastor Greg Harris

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

This is our reading from Ruth 1:1-22,

“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelek, 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 ten years, both Mahlon 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. 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 gave 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. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ‘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. 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?’ ‘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.' So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning."

Well good morning. My name is Greg, I'm one of the pastors here at Northview. I'm actually the Campus Pastor at our East Abbotsford Campus. If you haven't been there yet and you live on that side of town, I'd love to see you - even if you don't live on that side of town, it would be great to have you over there at some point. I asked Kendra to read that passage in one go because we're starting our sermon series in the book of Ruth, and it's a story, it's one story that's supposed to be read in one sitting. And it's a compelling story. It's a story that I actually think could be summarized best by the words of a guy named William Cowper.

William Cowper was a poet from the 18th Century, he was an elite poet. He was well known, people loved his work even though he was a bit of a recluse. He lived out in kind of the burbs of 18th century England. And his story, as a man, started very, very sadly actually. When he was a little boy, when he was six years old, his mother passed away. And that lose wrecked him and stuck with him in a very deep way. As he grew older his father actually sent him to a boarding school, and at the boarding school was he not only missing his mother, who had passed away, but had increasingly he was desperately missing his father as well. Loneliness and pain and sorrow was such a regular part of William's life. But man was he a gifted writer. He was so skilled, and yet he was deeply, deeply sorrowful - so much to the point that he actually attempted his own life - attempted to take his own life in multiple occasions. But he met a pastor by the name of John Newton. Newton was a pastor in his town, and Newton saw his brilliance in his writing and he knew that he loved the Lord, and even though there was such great sorrow that oppressed him every single day, Newton wanted to mobilize this guy's skill to serve the church, and so he asked Cowper to be involved in writing a hymnal that Newton was working on. Newton's the guy who wrote, *Amazing Grace*, so he's written a few good songs in his day. William Cowper wrote a poem that's been set to music throughout the years. There's no one dominant melody that stuck, but the lyrics are beautiful. They go like this, the song's called, *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*, it says,

"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm... Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face."

That line, "behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face," I think is a fantastic summary of the book of Ruth. We're going to be spending the next four weeks looking at this book. My encouragement to you, is over the next four weeks that we're studying this book, would you at least once in the week, would you just sit down and read the whole story cover to cover? It's four chapters, it will take probably 15-20 minutes for you to do it, but if you do that, I promise when you come and you hear the next chapter being preached from, there's going to be moments where you'll see the foreshadowing and you'll see the beauty of the literature. It's a piece of art, the book of Ruth. And so we want to work through it in the next four weeks, and today we're going to start in chapter one as we



probably should if we're going to start the book somewhere. And as we look at this chapter we're going to notice two things a part of - this part of the story, act 1 of the book of Ruth. we're going to see two things. First of all, that's there's evidence of heavy sorrows, and secondly there's evidence of signs of hope. We're going to walk through Ruth 1, and in the story we're going to see evidence of heavy sorrows and also, signs of hope. So let's start by looking at the evidence of the heavy sorrows that the book of Ruth is initiated with.

[Heavy Sorrows]

So Ruth 1:1-2,

“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.”

So if we're going to understand the book of Ruth, the story of Ruth well, we have to understand where the story actually begins. And actually the story doesn't begin with Ruth, the story begins with someone named Naomi. See the first chapter of Ruth isn't about Ruth hardly at all, it's about Naomi - it's about her journey as an Israelite woman. And if we're going to understand this story well, we have to recognize that the story in Ruth 1 is really an accumulation of sorrows. It's as if Naomi has a backpack on, and over the course of her life, weight, after weight of heavy sorrows and burdens get placed into the backpack that she wears on the journey of her life. The first weight that's placed in her backpack is the fact that she lives in the time of the judges.

So the time of the judges was the point in Israel's history where Israel was a nation in Egypt, they're were a bunch of slaves. They were being oppressed by the Egyptians and they were calling out to the Lord to be delivered. And through Moses and other things, plagues - all kinds of stuff, he got them *out* of Egypt, they crossed *over* the Red Sea on dry ground and they were faced the land that the Lord said, “I'm going to give you this land to be my people and I'll be your God.” And they look at the land, there's people in the land. And they say to themselves, “Look I know God found a way to defeat the biggest, baddest, empire on the land, but it's too hard for us to go in there.” So they rebelled against God's plan, and God said, “Okay, here's the deal, the generation that said ‘We can't go in the land.’ We're going to wait til you all die, and then you'll get to inherit the Promised Land.” So over the years, the people that rebelled against God and didn't go into the Promised Land the first time, start passing away - which by the way, could you imagine the awkwardness of being one of the last people of that generation, people coming up to you, “How are you feeling Bill?” [Laughter] “Great.” They're like, “Okay, I guess we'll wait.” The last person from that first generation rebellion had to die, and then once that person passed, they went into the Promised Land. But, before they had their own kingdom, they didn't have one king, instead they lived in the time known as the judges where there was this cycle of what's known as the cycle of apostasy - the cycle of turning away from God that took place in the town of the judges where they would, they would be in a time of freedom



and worshipping God, but then they would be drawn away to worship the other gods of the lands of their neighbours. And they would sin, and the sin would bring consequences, and the Lord would bring punishment upon them, and the people would cry out to God for deliverance. God would send a judge to deliver them, and then they'd be in another time of freedom and peace, but then they would start to worship the other gods. And there's this cycle of apostasy. The time of the judges was a time of upheaval - chaos. It's a burden in your backpack right? Everyday you wake up, what's it going to look like for the next few weeks? Is it going to be a stable time or not? Actually the whole surrounding area, at this time, the whole ancient world, was in a bit of a chaotic turn. Some of the known, biggest empires of the day, the Egyptians, and the Mesopotamians, and the Greeks - they were either in decline or upheaval themselves. The time of the judges was a time of massive socio-political upheaval and unease. It's a burden to bear.

It's not the only burden that Naomi had to bear, she also had a famine in her land. There's no food anymore. Bethlehem means, the place of bread. There's no food in the place of bread. That adds some weight to the backpack, doesn't it? And because there's no food, now she has to take up the life of an immigrant. So here's this young mom with her husband; she's leaving behind her village, she's leaving behind her friends and family, she's leaving behind everything she's ever known for the sake of finding food, and a hope, and a future, in a different land. And now she wears the backpack of an immigrant woman. Sorrow after sorrow, burden after burden being placed on her in the midst of a very turbulent time, but the weights are only going to get heavier. Ruth 1:3-5,

“Now Elimelek, 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 ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.”

Not only is Naomi an immigrant in a different land, she's away from her people, she's in the land of Moab, but now she's in the land of Moab and her husband has died. She goes through life, we don't know for how long she goes through life, but she goes through life as a single mom hoping her sons find wives, and eventually they do. And she goes to the weddings and she, and you know she has the dress, and they're cutting the cake, and she's taking the pictures, and it's a celebratory day, but at the same time she's remembering to herself, that this day would have been sweeter had her husband been there.

Now her sons are married to women, Orpah and Ruth - it's not Oprah by the way, Orpah and Ruth. And at some point her sons die - more weight gets added to her back. She's an immigrant woman, she's away from her home and her family, everything she's ever known and now she's grieving the loss of the people closest to her. Some heavy sorrows. But they get heavier actually, Ruth 1:5,

“Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.”

See we need to understand that in the ancient world, that's not just grieving the loss of loved ones like we've all done, but that's grieving the loss of loved ones with no future potential way to have stability



in your life. See in the ancient world, if you were a woman, you were dependent on your husband and sons to provide for you. So not only is [Naomi] grieving, but she has no hope for having provision and protection come her way. Desperately alone. She has no ID, no credit cards, no cash, no security, no provision, she's overwhelmed. Those are heavy sorrows in that backpack.

But look, isn't that the way sorrows go? You know that the way life is that it's never just one bad thing that happens, right. Like when it rains, it pours. Right, it's not like living here in Abbotsford when it rains it's like a mist that just hanging in the air - it's like living in other parts of the world where it's sunny all the time but then when it rains, man doesn't it *pour* and it's *flooding* the streets with your sorrows. This is the only redeeming point of country music by the way, right. [Laughter] Is that they get this part right, they recognize that it's not just that you lost your job, it's also that your dog died, your girlfriend left, and your truck died, you have nothing. That's the only good part of country music, is that it accurately reflects the nature, the *real nature* of human sorrow, which it never just comes in ones, it comes in bunches.

Naomi is feeling the heavy sorrows of real life, so much so that when she sees people that she knows they say, "Naomi, we see you." And she says in Ruth 1:20-21

“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.'”

Naomi, in this section, she's playing on - it's a play on words. Her name means pleasant, Mara means bitter. She's like, "Don't call me Pleasant. You see me come home to Bethlehem, and you're saying, 'Oh, Pleasant's back!' Don't call me that, it's Bitter, my name's Bitter now." See she's living in the midst of the heavy sorrows, she's looking through the photos of her life. She sees the pictures of her dating her husband, she sees the pictures of her engaged to her husband, she sees the pictures of the wedding day, she sees photos of her boys being born. She's looking through the photo album of her life. Even the photos when she has to leave as an immigrant, she's thinking to herself, "At least we were together." Then they arrive to a new land and her husband is dead, and now she's looking at the wedding photos of her sons who married Moabite women, and she's thinking, "My husband should have been there." And now she's looking photos from her sons' funerals. And people say, "Welcome back, Pleasant." And she says, "That's not my name, that's not my story." Naomi's living in the midst of heavy sorrows.

The story of Naomi is actually a reminder of the reality of sorrow. This is the human experience. The question is not; will we experience suffering in our life, the question is; how are we going to experience the suffering in our life. We have all kinds of ways we try to answer that question. One of the most common approaches is through distraction. We just ignore the sorrows around us. Things happen to us and we refuse to engage in them, and think about them and process them and recognize that they're there. We blind ourselves from the fact that our life will one day end. We distract ourselves from the reality of our own demise. This is the Netflix and chill approach. Right, which by the way, that phrase doesn't mean like just watch Netflix and then hang around your house. If you have young



adults and you're a parent, don't say, "Let's have a family night, Netflix and chill." Don't do that. But Netflix and chill, is basically saying, "Let's consume the entertainment, to distract ourselves and now let's do something else: sex, drugs, alcohol, whatever to actually give us *something* that feels good to mask the pain." We don't deal with sorrows very well. We mostly just distract ourselves. Or we achieve our way through. We say, "Man, there's all kinds of sorrows in my life, but I'm just going to throw myself into my work."

"I'm going to throw myself into my education."

"I'm going to throw myself into my family."

"I'm going to distract myself through achievement." There's another way that we deal with suffering that's not ideal. It's kind of a quazi-Christian way. It's stumbling through life as though we're burdened by false guilt. See some of us operate with the mentality, that everytime we suffer it's necessarily because we've sinned. So don't get me wrong, the reason why there's suffering is because of sin - but that doesn't mean that necessarily every time you suffer it's because of a particular sin. Some suffering comes as a consequence of sin, but not all suffering is necessarily a response, or a consequence, of a particular sin.

When I was in grade 11 through my college years, I had all kinds of like stomach issues, right. Some days were no big deal, other days would completely debilitated with cramping and all kinds of just awful stuff. I went to doctor after doctor and did all kinds of tests and take this herb, and do this thing, and poke this needle, and the whole bit, right. After all the years of testing, the doctors came to me and they said, "Okay, here's the deal. You have Irritable Bowel Syndrome." And I said, "That's not a diagnosis, cause I told you I have an irritable bowel, so you just put syndrome at the end, that doesn't count." [Laughter] One of the days I was particularly bad, when I was struggling with this, I was working at a local restaurant, I won't use the name, let's call it the Blue Bird restaurant. And I was there as a busboy, and my boss, Christian man, came up to me, and he knew I was struggling. I actually asked him if it was okay if I snuck away from my shift early, cause the cramping was just really terrible that day. And he said, "Ah you can go home early, but here's the deal. We got to find the sin that's causing this. Like there's got to be something Greg, you don't just suffer for no reason, there's got to be some particular sin that's causing all of this pain in your life." Now look, there are pains in our lives caused by sin, but that doesn't mean that everytime we suffer is necessarily because of a particular sin. And if we believe that every time we suffer it's because we've sinned, we can stumble through our suffering with a false guilt, thinking to ourselves that this is a punishment for something and trying to find that particular thing. So look, if we're not supposed to walk through our suffering with false guilt, or just by distracting ourselves through amusement or achievement, then how are we supposed to walk through suffering.

Actually I think Tim Keller answers that question really well, because the question is not how, or not will we experience suffering, but how will we experience it in his book, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, he says these words. He says,

"The walking metaphor points to the idea of progress. Many ancients saw adversity as merely something to withstand and endure without flinching, or even feeling, until it goes away. Modern Western people see suffering as something like adverse weather, something you avoid



or insulate yourself from until it passes by. The unusual balance of the Christian faith is seen in the metaphor of walking—through darkness, swirling waters, or fire. We are not to lose our footing and just let the suffering have its way with us. But we are also not to think we can somehow avoid it or be completely impervious to it either. We are to meet and move through suffering without shock and surprise, without denial of our sorrow and weakness, without resentment or paralyzing fear, yet also without acquiescence or capitulation, without surrender or despair."

The way we engage our suffering dear friends, is by walking through it. You wake up, and you put one foot in front of the other. You walk through it. Ruth 1 makes clear that heavy sorrows is a reality of the human experience, and Christians don't distract themselves from it, and they don't live in false guilt for it, they just walk through it.

Have you ever witnessed a Christian person walk through a life of suffering with just a grace to them? You know their story, you know the chronic pain that they deal with - either it's physical or emotional or mental - it's something. You know it, but when other people watch them, they wouldn't think to themselves that that person is suffering, because they just keep going, every day. Doesn't mean they don't have bad days, doesn't mean there aren't days when they break down and cry, but there is a determination to them. There's a grit. They wake up, they keep going, they don't deny that their pains are there, but they also refuse to feel forgotten by God in the midst of them. They just wake up, and in the midst of heavy sorrows, they walk through their suffering.

[Signs of Hope]

The question is how can you actually do that? How can you live, not denying the reality of your suffering, but refusing to forget, or to think that God's forgotten you in the midst of your suffering. How do you do that? Well I think this passage will show us, secondly, that there's signs of hope. So Ruth 1, remember it's mostly about Naomi this story. And the story continues in Ruth 1:6-10,

"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 [own] mother's home. 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.'"

I think this passage actually shows us two signs of hope. The first sign of hope: man there's food back in Bethlehem. Right, remember Naomi's an immigrant woman. She left from Bethlehem, to go to Moab because there was no food in the house of bread. So she went to Moab, and while in Moab she lost everything. But now she hears new, that man, back where I'm from, where my family and friends all are - there's food back there. That's a sign of hope. She can go back home, she can find food, and the



picture in her mind is that she tells her daughters in law, “Okay, come with me, we’re going to go back to where I’m from, where there’s going to be food, and maybe we’ll make some connections there.” And they’re on the journey, carrying the backpack of their sorrows with them, when at some point on the journey, Naomi turns to her daughters in law and she says, “Here’s the deal, you guys got to go back.” Now when we first read that, that seems like a weird move on Naomi’s part right? Seems kind of like a jerk move, like, “I don’t want you anymore.” But actually, I don’t think we’re supposed to read her comments to her daughters-in-laws an aggressive act or an unfriendly act, I actually think it’s the most kind thing that she thought she could do. Two reasons why I think it was a really kind intention for Naomi to tell her daughters to go back. The first one I think would be a reason was kind because she keeps heaping blessings on them. She doesn’t just say, “Ah go back, I don’t want you, I’m bored with you.” She says, “Go back, because man, I hope God blesses you there. I hope the Lord provides for your every need. I hope my God, Yahweh, provides for you. Go back, I hope he blesses you.”

Second reason though is more of a historical reason. We can’t forget that Orpah and Ruth are *Moabite* women, Moabite *widows* actually. See Naomi knows what it’s like to enter into a different land as an immigrant and have everyone recognize that you’re not from around here. She doesn’t want that same experience for her daughters-in-law. Moabite women aren’t particularly popular with the Israelite boys. So what future would these Moabite, immigrant women have in Israel that, that actually leads to our second sign of hope that this passage points out. Because even though she’s like, “Don’t come with me!” Her daughters-in-law say, “No, no, we’re coming. You’re not going to go alone, we’re going to go with you back to where you’re from.” See there are signs of hope, there’s food, there’s companionship. Even in the midst of heavy sorrows, there are signs of hope. But Naomi actually doesn’t stop there. See later on in the passage she tells them, “No, no look, you can’t come with me because my life is going to be really terrible there, cause I have no prospect for a future. Remember I can’t provide for myself, I have no husband, no sons, I’m too old to get married.” And she even says, “Look if I had the opportunity to give you husbands, it’s not going to happen.” There was a law in the people of Israel called the Levirate Law, where if you had a husband who passed away, the brother of that husband was supposed to step in and marry his sister-in-law for the purpose of providing for her and protecting her. Because without that provision and protection, she would be completely destitute. Her future would be prostitution. Naomi’s saying to her daughters-in-law, “Look, I’m not going to be able to produce anymore sons in time for you guys to be provided for. And no one in Israel is going to want to marry Moabite women. You have a better shot of actually having a future and a hope that I hope the Lord gives you, if you just go back home.” So with tears in her eyes, she pleads with her daughters-in-law to go back home and then in Ruth 1:14-18,

“At this they [the daughters-in-law] wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ‘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.”



See the same pleading, “Don’t come with me, there’s no hope for you in Israel. No hope for you in Bethlehem. No one’s going to marry you, you’re going to end up as prostitutes.” That same pleading has two different responses; a logical and an illogical one. Orpah responds logically. She sees the situation before her and she knows, “Ah, I’m not going to be able to find a husband. And if I don’t have anyone to protect me as an immigrant, in a different land, I’m going to end up a prostitute.” So even though she loves Naomi, she, with tears in her eyes, hugs her mother-in-law and goes back home where there’s at least a chance at a future. But Ruth makes the illogical choice. See she, it’s a harder deal with her to go with Naomi then to go back home. But the reason why Ruth chose Naomi is not only the fact that she loves her mother-in-law. Ruth is willing to go through the racial tensions, the potential for loneliness, the likelihood that she won’t be provided for and will have to end up going into prostitution because of the great declaration she makes to Naomi when she says that, “Where you go I’ll go, where you stay I’ll stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Here’s a Moabite woman saying, “I’m a follower of Yahweh now. I’m going with you.” And Naomi, even though she doesn’t know what the future holds, finally allows her daughter-in-law to continue the journey back to Bethlehem with her. See there are signs of hope, there’s food to come, there’s companionship there. So they enter, Ruth 1:19-22,

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

Heavy sorrows for Naomi. But also signs of hope. They’re coming back to Bethlehem during the barley harvest, food’s there. She’s not by herself, Ruth is there. What’s interesting about this story though is that Naomi doesn’t actually recognize these signs of hope. See if you choose to take up the Ruth challenge and read it actually once a week for the whole time we do this sermon series. You would notice things like how in verse 22 it’s a beautiful, delightful, little foreshadow of the hope yet to come. The fact that Naomi has Ruth with her and it’s at a barley harvest, you’d read the story and start giggling like, “Ah it’s going to get good!” But Naomi doesn’t see that things are about to get good. She doesn’t see the signs of hope.

So I actually want to engage with that idea, that there are two signs of hope. That there’s food and also that she has companionship, but Naomi doesn’t see it. So let’s think about that for a minute. First of all, let’s think about the fact that even though in the midst of the heavy sorrows, Naomi forgets that Ruth is clinging to her. So imagine you’re Ruth. You make a bold proclamation to say, “I’m going to go wherever you go, I’m now following Yahweh.” And you continue the journey back to Bethlehem, you arrive in Bethlehem, and everyone’s so excited to see Naomi. And they’re like, “It’s amazing you’re back, it’s incredible.” And she says, “Don’t call me Naomi, call me Bitter. I got nothing! God gave me nothing left.” And Ruth is standing there. You’re thinking to yourself, “Ah I’m here, Mom.” But Naomi



forgot that actually an evidence of God's grace was clinging to her. Man, we are so much like Naomi. In the midst of our heaviest sorrows, we forget the evidences of God's grace clinging to us.

Every month we have a staff meeting here at Northview, and we make a habit of doing a thing in our staff meeting called, evidences of God's grace, where we go around the table, and either in our own life or in our ministry life we start talking about evidences that we see God's grace. It's a good habit, cause some months things are going awesome, and other months they're not. But there are still evidences of his grace, yeah?

Early in our marriage, we were coached by a mentor couple who told us that when we pray together don't forget in the midst of all your pleadings for God to change situations, for you to still recognize the evidences of his grace. Cause even though our backpack is heavy with our sorrows, the evidences of his grace are still there. Look those evidences of God's grace, the Ruths clinging to us, don't actually erase our pain. The pain is still there, but at the same time we have to be the kind of people who refuse to let our pain erase the evidences of God's grace still clinging to us. They're still there. Naomi didn't see it, we often don't as well.

But there's another sign of hope, in this part of the story. Actually the sign of hope that is that even in the midst of the heavy sorrows, Naomi doesn't see that there's a barley harvest. There's a big party for the barley harvest time, right. This is like the Agrifair of Bethlehem. Here's Naomi, here's Mara, here's Bitter, coming into the middle of the Agrifair with snow cones and cotton candy and Ruth clinging to her, saying, "Nothing's going my way." And they're like, "Sorry we can't hear you, the country bands playing." Right, cause country music's awesome. They're at the party man, there's the beard oil table going on, there's the craft barely beverage thing happening there. The scene just bursting with happiness. This would have been an annual party, but imagine a party you'd throw after years and years and years of famine. And finally there's food, there's bread back in the house of bread. And that's a good party - you'd bring in a big act, you'd bring in like Chris Tomlin for that party, right.

But Naomi can't actually see the celebration because she doesn't see outside of her own story. And man we can relate with Naomi. Because our sorrows are heavy, and they weigh us down, and we are so prone to just look and stare in the mirror of our own sorrows, rather than look outside the window to see what else God is doing. We act like our story is *the* big story. But it's not, see Naomi's problem is that doesn't recognize that the barley scene is actually a scene of great hope. Look as we go through the book of Ruth, you're going to see that barley is the most hopeful of all the grains. Not just because of the barley festival and the craft barely beverage table, but because of what Ruth will find in a barley field a little bit later in the story. So spoiler alert: Ruth is going to go into a barley field. She's going to see a person named Boaz, and through a series of events - that's a really good story, you should come back and hear it - her and Boaz eventually get married. And they have a son. They're sons name is Obed. And then Obed has a son, and his name is Jesse. And Jesse has a son, and his name is David. See, in the time of the judges when everything's chaotic, and everything's in upheaval, and there's no sign of when stability will come - in walks a Moabite immigrant widow. See, we think as we're reading Ruth 1 that the story's going to be about Naomi, who's the Israelite, immigrant widow in Moab. But actually the story is rightly called Ruth, because the story's about a Moabite, immigrant



widow who comes to Israel. And through this Moabite immigrant widow, she'll have a husband, and through her family line will come the great king of Israel. And she'll meet her husband in a barley field. See isn't barley great? It's a sign of hope. It's a sign that there's a bigger story than just Naomi's story. See through Naomi's line there's going to be a king who will come to protect his people, to provide for his people. Hope's coming, Naomi just can't see it quite yet. But we can relate to Naomi, we are prone to stare into the mirror of our own sorrows and never move our eyes out the window of what God's bigger story is.

So how is it that Christians can walk through their suffering that they're wearing every single day? The way that they can do it, is they stop looking in the mirror and they remember the big story of what God is doing. They remind themselves that their little story, as sorrowful and painful as it is, is a part of a bigger, master story that God is writing. And here's the story. That in eternity past, God existed. Happily, living in the land of the Trinity, where he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He didn't need anything else, but he chose that out of his joy to show his own glory to create. And he created and he said, "Man that's good. I like that." And then he decided, "No I'm going to put actually some people in that creation, they're going to run it for me. They're going to enjoy what I created. They're my image bearers." He looks at them and he says, "Man, they're very good." But those image bearers look back at the God who created them, and they say, "But you're not very good. We actually think we'd be better off making the calls. Calling the shots." And so they rebel against the God who's there, against the God who created them out of his joy for the demonstration of his glory. They say, "No we're going to follow our own ways." And because of that in comes suffering and sin. But man this God who created so desperately wanted his image bearers to know what it was like to live and flourish. And so he sent a king to provide for his people and protect them. A king through the line of Ruth, the Moabite, named, Jesus. Who through his perfect life and his death on the cross provided the atonement that we need to be saved. And through his resurrection from the grave, he protects his people for an eternity. And now he looks to his people and he says, "Look, you have a future, and you have a hope. There's a day when the creation that is here is going to be renewed and remade. It's going to be perfect." Again you'll at it and say, "It's very good." And God will look at it, and say, "It's very good, but it's even better than it was before." And our stories of sorrow are *woven into* that greater story of hope.

The only way we can walk through our suffering is by reminding ourselves of the bigger story. See this past week, my family has been ill. Which is why I'm like tapping my nose all the time. And my daughter in particular, one year old, she had double ear infection at one point in the week. Tylenol is not helping, the fever's still spiking, the whole deal. We have to go get antibiotics. There was one point in the week where as a parent, right, you'll do anything to comfort your one year old. Right, you'll dance, you'll play whatever game they want to play. What my daughter found helpful was if I just held her and was singing to her. So I chose to sing, <singing> "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." But look, I'm also a pragmatist, because if *Baby Beluga* would have worked, man I would have done it. But the reason I sing, *Jesus Loves Me*, over my kids in the midst of their hardest moments, is because they're moments that are going to come for my kids. And the song that I want going through their brain in the midst of their suffering, is that Jesus loves them. Cause the only way they'll be able to walk through the suffering of their life, is if they remember the bigger story.



Look I know that pain is a part of our life. I was reminded of this very clearly in the early days of my son's life when we were spending time in BC Children's Hospital, not because of what he was going through necessarily, but in one of our stays there we were in a room where there was four of us in a room - divided just by curtains, right. And there was a girl in the same room that my son was in, and her name was Lexi, and my wife and I still think about Lexi all the time. She's probably about two and a half or so at this time - man, smiley Lexi. She was born in that hospital, and she had never left the hospital because of all the various health issues that she has. Sometimes she'd have her own room, sometimes she'd have to be in a room that was shared by other people. And we met her parents early on in the week and they asked if we wouldn't mind, if the curtain could be left open when they were gone, because they had a go fly home. Because the husband had to go work and the wife had to be with the rest of their other kids. So Lexi would be in there day after day with no visitors, smiling away. But also in great pain. See there's pain out there. There's sorrow out there. My wife and I think about, "Man, where's Lexi at now, and I wonder how her parents are doing. And what would it have to been like to have to leave your kid at BC Children's Hospital for all those days in a row. I can't imagine." But there's not just pain out there, look I know there's pain here. There's anxiety, there's depression, there's addictions, there's despair, there's health issues, there's relationship fractures, there's deep grief over the loss of loved ones. Pain is the backpack we wear everyday. But Jesus loves you, right?

I'm actually convinced that one of the best things we can do as Christians, is think about what new creation will be like. As I'm holding my daughter and singing to her, I'm thinking to myself, "I have to write a sermon, so if you could feel better, that'd be amazing." But when I wasn't thinking that, I was thinking about what new creation would be like. I'm fairly convinced at this point that one of the regular things we'll do in eternity future is, over nice cups of coffee on brisk mornings with just a light jacket on, and the cool air in our face, we'll sit across from people and we'll ask them, "What's your story? Before you got here, what was your story like?" I'm praying, that one of those days in eternity future, I'll be able to have a conversation over a cup of coffee with someone named Lexi. I'll be able to ask her, "So what was your story?" Another conversation I want to have in new creation is with someone named, Naomi. If I ever get the chance to have that cup of coffee with her, I would not be surprised if that she tells me her story, that she was an Israelite woman, who was an immigrant in Moab, and she went with her husband and her two sons, but they all died. She came back to her land with one daughter-in-law named Ruth. I would not be surprised if Naomie looked at me and she told me, "To judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides his smiling face." Let me pray for us.

Father, you're good and your word is good and you remind us of your goodness, not always through our life situations, although there are evidences of your grace there. But you remind us of your goodness *mostly* in the person and work of you son, Jesus. Father, allow the good news of his life and death and resurrection, and soon return in our hope yet to come - allow that news to just root in our hearts today. Draw our eyes away from the mirror of our own stories outside the window of the great gospel. Be with us by your Spirit, Lord we pray, for your fame and in Jesus name, Amen.

God bless you guys.