

BITTERNESS WILL ROT YOUR SOUL BUT WILL CHRIST WILL MAKE IT SWEET: Ruth 1:19-22

Ruth 1

Naomi and Ruth Return

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Beth-
lehem. And when they came to Bethlehem,^p the
whole town was stirred because of them. And the
women said, "Is this Naomi?"

20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi;¹ call me
Mara,² for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with
me.

21 "I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back
empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testi-
fied against me and the Almighty has brought
calamity upon me?"

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her
daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the
country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem^s at
the beginning of barley harvest.

INTRODUCTION

Q. How do you respond to pain and suffering? When you are afflicted,

what goes through your mind? What feelings rise up? What comes out of your mouth or through your keyboard or from your pen?

- **Beloved, you must watch out for bitterness taking root in your own heart.**
- Bitterness is poison in your soul that leads to harboring angry feeling or thoughts. At times bitterness even causes poisonous words to spew from your mouth!
- **Q. What is bitterness? A.** Bitterness is rot in the soul which springs from anger; anger springs from someone wronging you or simply thinking someone wronged you.

BIG IDEA: Affliction will result in bitterness if you do not keep your eyes fixed on your Redeemer. Thankfully there is more grace in Christ than sin in you!

FIRST, labor with me to understand this passage and what is going on here.

I. Naomi and Ruth returned to the Bethlehem, the House of Bread (v.19)

Ruth 1:19 "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'"

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II. Naomi wanted her named changed from Pleasant to Bitter because the LORD had dealt bitterly with her (v.20)

Ruth 1:20 "She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.'"

- **Q. What does Naomi mean? Solomon writes in Proverbs 3:17** "[Wisdom's] ways are ways of *pleasantness* (same root word as *Naomi*), and all her paths are peace."
- **Q. What does Mara mean?** Well, do you remember in **Exodus 15** when the people of God were just delivered from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt? They came to a place where they could not drink water because the water was bitter. Do you remember what they called the place? They named the place "Marah" because that word means "bitterness."
- **CHILDREN:** Have you ever wished that you had a different name?

III. Naomi looked only at her current circumstance, even misconstruing the story of her life (v.21a)

Ruth 1:21a "I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty."

- **Q.** Had she left Bethlehem full?

IV. Naomi knew that it was the LORD who had brought calamity on her, though she wrongly understood why (v.21b)

Ruth 1:21b "Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

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V. Despite the bitterness of Naomi, the LORD was working to redeem both her and Ruth (v.22)

Ruth 1:22 "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."

NOW, how can we be instructed by this, learning from the example?

We would do best, I think, to carefully consider what God says concerning bitterness and how we can best put it to death.

AGAIN: Q. What is bitterness? **A.** Bitterness is rot in the soul which springs from anger; anger springs from someone wronging you or simply thinking someone wronged you.

Bitterness is poison in your soul that leads to harboring angry feelings or thoughts. At times bitterness even causes poisonous words to spew from your mouth!

I. WHAT DOES GOD SAY CONCERNING BITTERNESS?

I) Sinners are identified by their mouths being full of curses and bitterness (Romans 3:14)

Romans 3:14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

- How horrible that the lips that were created to praise have been corrupted with curses and bitterness!
- What should be full of sweetness, sin has ruined and made full of poison.
- And mark it down, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."
- **THOMAS BOSTON:** "A spirit of bitterness, fieriness, and selfishness, whatever men profess, is a black mark, it is so very unlike Christ's way!"

II) Bitterness is a root that causes bitter fruit (Deuteronomy

29:18)

Deuteronomy 29:18 "Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit."

- When you let bitterness stay in your house, happiness will find another place to live and obedience will travel to a far off country.
- Bitterness chokes out happiness and starves the joy needed for persevering obedience!

III) Bitterness will lead you to doubt God's goodness (Ruth 1:21a)

Ruth 1:21a "'I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.'"

- **CHILDREN:** Did you know God is in control of everything? Did you also know God is good?
- **Q. What is goodness? A.** Goodness does not mean "the opposite of badness." Goodness does not mean the same thing as "righteous." Goodness means *kindness, mercy, patience, generosity*. That God is good means God is kind, God is merciful, God is patient, God is generous.
- **Psalms 100:5** "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."
- **I)** God *is* good; **II)** God *does* what is good—He does what is good to all mankind and especially to His saints. **III)** God did His highest good by sending His only Son Jesus to die for sinners so that someone as bad as you could be happy forever with Him!
- The poison of bitterness drowns the glorious truths of God's goodness in doubt and despair.

IV) Bitterness will lead you to lie about God's providence (Ruth 1:21b)

Ruth 1:21b "'Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?'"

- Bitterness creates a poisonous fog before the eyes of your heart that will not let you see God's loving hand of providence.

V) In Christ, you must slay the sin of bitterness (Ephesians 4:31)

Ephesians 4:31 "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."

- Beloved, you must throw bitterness out in the cold to die or the home of your heart will be filled with wrath, anger, clamor, and malice.

- You must lance the boil of bitterness before the infection spreads.
- Bitterness is a dragon and you must slay it with the Sword of the Spirit by God's grace!

II. HOW CAN YOU SLAY THE SIN OF BITTERNESS?

I) In Christ, you can slay the sin of bitterness toward your neighbor by forgiving them, remembering that God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32)

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

II) In Christ, you can slay the sin of bitterness toward God by remembering that He is your loving Father (Ephesians 5:1)

Ephesians 5:1 "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."

- **Is this not what would have healed Naomi of her bitterness?** Indeed it is what healed her—eventually she remembered that the Lord loves her and had a plan the whole time!
- **I) When your loving Father afflicts you, remember the LORD has never done anything unjust to anyone nor can He! Be like Job and say,** "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (**Job 1:21**)
- **II) When your loving Father afflicts you, remember that it is good to be afflicted! David says in Psalm 119:71,** "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."
- **III) When your loving Father afflicts you, remember He may be bringing about the redemption of someone else—like Ruth in Naomi's case! Pray to have simple faith like Paul who said in 2 Cor. 4:11-12,** "11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you."
- **IV) When your loving Father afflicts you, remember He is working sovereignly to bring about your final redemption! It may be bitter for you like Naomi, but the Barley harvest is just around the corner.**

III) In Christ, you can slay the sin of bitterness toward God by remembering Christ loves you and even gave Himself up for you on the cross (Ephesians 5:2)

Ephesians 5:2 "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

- Oh shove the syringe of Christ Crucified into your soul and you can suck out the poison!
- Affliction will result in bitterness if you do not keep your eyes fixed on your Redeemer. Oh but there is more grace in Christ than sin in you!
- Despite your bitterness, in Christ, God is working to redeem every molecule, including you!
- Oh then, beloved, impale your bitterness with the splintered cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will slay the poisonous beast!

Precious saint, you have no justified reason to ever let bitterness poison your soul or spew from your lips! Though God may deal bitterly with you for your sanctification, has He not dealt more bitterly with Christ to secure your salvation?

On the cross, Jesus willingly drank the bitter cup of God's wrath that was filled up for you. He drank the bitter curse of God's judgement that have earned so that you would receive the happy blessing of His mercy!

Look to Christ and Him crucified in faith and watch your bitterness run away.

- Throw Christ Crucified into the waters of your bitterness and it must turn sweet!
- If you confess your sins and cling to Christ alone for salvation, you can say, "Call me not Mara, for the Lord has dealt very pleasantly with me. Call me Naomi!"

Bitterness will rot your soul, but Christ will make it sweet.

THOMS BOSTON: "O what agonies and conflicts, what sharp encounters, and distresses, did he meet with from the wrath of God that was poured out upon him! He bore the wrath of an angry God, pure wrath without any alloy or mixture, and all that wrath which was due to the elect through all eternity for their innumerable sins. Sin was so hateful to God, that nothing could expiate it, or satisfy for it, but the death and *bitter* agonies of his dear Son."

THOMAS BOSTON: "He underwent the wrath of God. Thus he humbled himself to drink the bitter dregs of his Father's wrath for us. The curse of the law was laid upon him, and he bore it for us, Galatians 3:13. His soul was troubled, John 12:27. He was beset with sorrows of the deepest sort, when he said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," Matthew 26:38.

He was in an agony, so as it made him sweat great drops of blood, that trickled from his blessed body in a cold night in the open air. Whence was all this but from the load of his Father's wrath that lay on him, on account of all the sins of his elect people imputed to him? a load, which, if laid on all the angels in heaven and men on earth, would have sunk them to the lowest hell!"

THOMAS BOSTON: "When men insolently rise against God, belching out bitter, virulent, and reproachful speeches against him. So did Pharaoh, Exodus 5:2, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord." So did he, mentioned 2 Kings 6:33, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord, what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Thus Job's wife advised him to blaspheme, "Curse God and die," said she. And so many in their bitterness rising against God under afflictions, are apt to blaspheme."

LASTLY, Throw Christ into the waters of your bitterness and it must turn sweet.