

[Read the text]

We see the grace of God displayed to His people:

- He visited His people: The word for “visit” means “to come to the aid of” or “intervene on behalf of”.
- He remembered His covenant: the reference is that He visited “His people”. This means that the Lord remembered His covenant. In His wrath, He remembers mercy. His anger lasts for a moment. God’s judgment and wrath is always accompanied by the offer of mercy and grace.
- He provided bread: The “house of bread” was being restocked (Blessing Box).
- Let it be heard in Moab what God has done for His people. We don’t know how the word got to her, but it did. That’s a clear picture of the Gospel. The Good News has come to the dark places.
- God has visited us... in the darkest of times and the darkest of places... God has visited us. In the person of His Son, God has visited us and given us bread.
 - In John 6, Jesus declared: *I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*
 - He offers fullness. What must we do? We must “return”... repent of our stay in Moab and return to the house of the Lord.

We see the condition of a broken woman:

- A woman with no conviction- Naomi proves to be very flawed in her faith and conviction, and it manifests itself during this journey back home. Let’s notice a few things about this episode.
 - Even though she was right to want to return to Judah, notice what drew her back. It was the food. Nowhere do we see her longing for the tabernacle or longing to be with her people again.
 - Also, notice in her conversations with her daughters in law. There are a few things that stand out here. While her concern for them is commendable, notice the things that she is primarily concerned about... temporal things.
 - We can’t overlook the audacity of what she says either. In encouraging these girls to return home, she is encouraging them to return to their mothers—yes. She is encouraging them to return to their nations—yes. But, don’t miss that she is encouraging them to return to their nation’s gods. Look at verse 15. What is an orthodox Jew doing encouraging these girls to go back to their gods?
 - What causes this? Well, let’s look at Naomi’s own words? Verse 13 she says that the Lord has gone out against her. In verse 21, she accuses God of testifying against her. Her improper perspective of God causes her to make these Moabite girls feel as though they would be better off in Moab—serving the Moabite gods.
 - Yes, in a lot of ways they would be better off in Moab if you look at things the way Naomi does. They would have a greater chance for a husband and a family. Greater chances of fulfilling their dreams. Greater chances of becoming who they wanted to become. **But is it worth the cost to chase after other gods?** Naomi convinces Orpah that it is. Is the pursuit of the American dream and the ideal life worth the cost of chasing after other gods? We have somehow lost our conviction in the church and are convincing the world that it is.

- In a recent article titled *Men without Convictions, Churches without People*, George Weigel points to this phenomenon. He talks about the secularization of Europe and he points to three specific instances that have happened recently.
 - One friar in the church refused to cite the creed because he didn't believe it and felt that they needed to say and sing other things that were more essential to life.
 - One reverend pointed out in a sermon that he felt that the world would have been better off without Jesus because there would have been no Crusades and no Inquisition.
 - Another priest refused to do mass because he had surmised that the nativity story was nothing more than a fairy tale with lullabies and bagpipes.
- As a result, when men and women of God lose their conviction, we lose the ability to preach the gospel message. God had intervened in Judah to bring the people bread and the message had resonated all the way to Moab, but Naomi was content to tell her daughters in law that they were better off in Moab.
- We do that too. We let our present circumstances display to the world that the gospel is not worth it and they are better off not having what we say we have. They are better off living to fulfill the American dream than they are living to fulfill the Gospel imperative of Jesus Christ.
 - You're better off on the field on Sunday than you are at church. Or the lake, or the woods. You're better off buying that than you are giving it to the church. You're better off striving for greatness than you are striving for godliness. You want to be smart but not sanctified. You want to be kind but not Christlike. You want to be happy but not holy.
 - And we have lost our conviction in the church, and have convinced the world that they are better off in Moab than they are coming with us to the land of Promise... no matter the cost.
- A woman with no hope: no husband and no sons. They had sold their land back home, so she had nothing to her name. She is too old to remarry, and she has no sons currently in her womb that will carry on anything for her. Naomi, virtually, did not exist. What she says is partially true... she has come back empty.

We see a glimmer of hope in the midst of darkness:

The first chapter ends with a transition statement, but it is a very important transition statement. "it was the beginning of barley harvest." This verse offers a transition toward hope for Naomi, as well as for Ruth.

- In the book of Ruth, it is the first time we see the word "hope" used in the entire Bible.
- Let's understand what *hope* actually means.
 - In English, the word hope usually means something that we want to happen, but we are unsure if it will.
 - In the Bible, though, it looks somewhat different. In the Bible, hope is not something that you are unsure about. Rather, it is something that you are very sure about, but that just hasn't happened yet. However, it is something that you very much look forward to and completely reshapes your outlook on life.

- Ruth is about biblical hope... and we are given the first glimpse of that here. “It is the beginning of barley harvest.” They arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.
 - Barley was the first crop to be harvested each year, so Naomi and Ruth are arriving in time to get settled when food would be plentiful and they could store up enough before the dry season.
 - The harvest will also set the stage for the entrance of Boaz... which will turn this story completely on its head.
- Maybe you are in a dark place in your life... get up, go “home”, and get ready for the barley harvest.