

I Came Back Empty: Ruth 1:19-22 Explained

Scriptures for Today: Ruth 1:19-22

Ruth 1:19-22

So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? 20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

When God Brings You Home

Have you ever looked at your life and thought: This isn't how I imagined it would turn out. Maybe when you were younger, you had plans. Dreams. Goals. You thought life would go one direction. Then suddenly you're somewhere you never expected to be.

That's Naomi in this passage. Ten years earlier she left Bethlehem. She left with a husband. She left with two sons. She left with hope. Now she's coming home. Her husband is dead. Her sons are dead. Her future appears gone. And the woman who left Bethlehem is not the same woman returning.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever come back somewhere after years away? Maybe your hometown. Maybe your childhood church. Maybe an old neighborhood. Everything feels familiar. Yet everything feels different. That's Naomi.

I. EVERYBODY IS TALKING

Ruth 1:19

So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Stop right there. Imagine the scene. Two women are walking into town. Dusty road. Tired feet. Years have passed. Suddenly people start noticing. Wait a minute. Isn't that Naomi? Can you imagine the conversations? I haven't seen her in years. Didn't she leave during the famine? Where's Elimelech? Where are her sons? The whole city starts talking.

The Bible says: "all the city was moved." This wasn't a small reaction. Everybody noticed. Why? Because people remember. Especially in a small town. Especially when someone leaves. Especially when someone comes back.

Imagine Naomi hearing whispers. People pointing. People staring. People asking questions. Some are curious. Some are excited. Some are concerned. And Naomi knows what they're about to ask.

II. NAOMI DOESN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HERSELF

Ruth 1:20

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

This is one of the saddest verses in the book. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara." Do you know what Naomi means? The name means pleasant. Do you know what Mara means? The name means bitter. Think about that.

Naomi says: Don't call me Pleasant anymore. Call me Bitter. How broken does someone have to be before they change their own name? That's where Naomi is right now in this story.

Imagine meeting an old friend after twenty years. You say: It's great to see you! And they respond: I'm not the same person anymore. Things have changed. "I'm not doing good."

That's Naomi. Pain changes people. Loss changes people. Heartbreak changes people. Sometimes people carry wounds nobody else can see. Naomi is hurting.

III. NAOMI THINKS GOD IS AGAINST HER

Ruth 1:20-21

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

Notice how many times she mentions God. "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. The LORD hath brought me home again empty. The LORD hath testified against me. The Almighty hath afflicted me."

Let me ask you something. Does Naomi still believe in God? Absolutely. She talks about Him constantly. But she misunderstands what God is doing. Naomi can't see it. But God is working even when you can't see it. Remember that. God is working even when you can't see it.

Was Naomi empty? She says she was. That's what she believed. But was she? Is Ruth standing right there with her? Yes. Is God still on His throne? Yes. Is Bethlehem still there? Yes. Is God's plan still moving forward? Yes. Then maybe Naomi isn't as empty as she thinks.

Look who's standing beside her. Ruth. This great woman of faith who has a book in the Bible. Ruth. Standing right there with her. The very woman God will use to change everything.

And you? Don't think you're alone. We're here with you. And when I say that, that's what I mean. Sometimes God is working in ways we cannot see. Sometimes we think God has abandoned us. And all the while God is preparing the next chapter.

Have you ever watched a movie and stopped halfway through? Imagine watching a movie and turning it off when the trouble comes. The story looks hopeless. Everything seems ruined. The hero looks defeated. Everything looks hopeless. Nothing makes sense. Then someone says: "You turned it off too soon. You gave up too early."

The story isn't over. You're just not at the end yet. That's Naomi. She thinks she's at the end of the story. She's standing there in Chapter 1 broken and bitter. She doesn't realize God already has Ruth Chapter 4 completed. She's only at the end of chapter 1. There's a chapter 4 coming soon.

IV. WHAT NAOMI COULDN'T SEE

Look closer there at verse 21. Naomi says: "I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty." Let's think about that a little more. Was she empty? No husband. True. No sons. True. But empty? No. Ruth is standing beside her. God is with her. She just thinks she's empty.

What if God had a purpose for Ruth? What if God brought Ruth into Naomi's life for a reason? What if God wasn't finished yet? We know the answer because we know the story. But Naomi doesn't. She's in a low spot in her life.

One of the great lessons of Ruth is this: **God is working even when you can't see it.**

V. THE TIMING OF GOD

Ruth 1:22

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

The chapter ends with a detail most people skip. "And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." Most people read that and keep going. They don't focus in on the word of God. We are today. Don't skip over words in the Bible.

Why did God include that? Because harvest is coming. The chapter begins with famine. Verse 1 in this chapter says, "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges rules, that there was a FAMINE in the land."

Now what do we see in this last verse? We're at the beginning of the barley harvest. Don't miss that. The chapter begins with famine. But it ends with harvest. The chapter begins with empty cupboards. No food. But it ends with full grain. It begins with funerals and ends with harvest. It begins with tears and ends with hope.

The chapter begins with Naomi saying goodbye. But it ends with Naomi coming home.

Things are changing. Naomi can't see it yet. Ruth can't see it yet. But God is already working. Naomi thinks her story is over. God knows it's just getting started. God is working even when you can't see it.

She's back in Bethlehem now. She's back among God's people. She's back where God wants her to be. And standing beside her is Ruth—the very woman God will use to change everything.

The same little town of Bethlehem that welcomed Naomi home would one day welcome the Savior of the world. Naomi sees loss. God sees a harvest. Naomi sees an ending. God sees a beginning.

And one of the great lessons of Ruth is this: God is working even when you can't see it.

Think about winter. Trees look dead. Fields look empty. Nothing appears alive. Then spring arrives. Suddenly life appears everywhere. That's how tough times work. Keep fighting through the tough times and the light will appear at the end of that dark tunnel. That's Naomi.

She thinks winter will last forever. God says harvest is coming. And the harvest is coming.

In the middle of winter everything looks dead. The trees look dead. The fields look dead. The flowers are gone. But life is still there. You just can't see it yet. God is working even when Naomi can't see it.

How many of you have ever gone through a season where you thought it would never end? And then one day you looked back and realized: God was working the whole time. Happens often throughout life.

CONCLUSION

When Naomi walked into Bethlehem she thought her story was over. She thought she was empty. She thought God was against her. She thought her best days were behind her. But she was wrong. Ruth was beside her. Boaz was ahead of her. A harvest was waiting for her.

And God was already writing the next chapter. Let me ask you one final question. What if God is doing something right now that you simply can't see yet? What if this chapter isn't the end for you? What if the harvest is closer than you think?

TRUE WORDS

Baptist Church

Revelation 21:5

Book of Ruth

Ruth 1:19-22

What if God is already working on the answer to a prayer you haven't seen answered yet? What if God is preparing the next chapter while you're still grieving this one? What if God is doing more than you realize?

Because the great lesson of Ruth 1 is this: **God is working even when you can't see it.**

Naomi couldn't see it. Ruth couldn't see it. But God was already preparing blessings they couldn't yet imagine. And sometimes the same thing is true in our lives. We think it's over, but when God is working out good for you nothing is over.

Let's pray.