

III. A Voice that is Silent (22)

- A. Reliable Ruth.
 - i. Still treated as a foreigner
 - ii. Ruth is a picture of the Church. (Eph. 2:11-13; 19-20)
- B. They came to Bethlehem.
- C. A Hint of Hope

LIVE THE STORY

The following questions are designed for use in our Community Groups as an aid to growth in the Gospel and Community.

Love the Story

- What are some of the ways the women of Bethlehem may have meant, “Is this Naomi?” What might the town chatter have been about?
- What is God’s response to Naomi’s bitter complaint?
- What do you think the town hum in regard to both Ruth and Naomi might have been?

Live the Story

- Have you ever experienced grief that you might describe as falling “into a deep black hole”? If so, how do you relate to Naomi’s words?
- Have you been near those who have experienced such deep grief? How might Naomi’s “rant” of grief inform us in how to engage those who grieve?
- Discuss Kopic’s illustration of increasing sized circles as a way to know how we might deal with those who grieve and our own?

Advance the Story

- Why do you think that the Hebrew might indicate that not *only* Naomi, but also Ruth returned to Bethlehem? What does that say about Ruth’s words and actions in the previous section (1:6-18)?
- How does Ruth foreshadow the church in this particular section?

Ruth: Resurrection, Righteousness, Redemption

A Grief Observed

Jerry Cisar — May 9, 2021

Text: Ruth 1:19-22

Introduction

“The literature on grief uses all sorts of images to capture the suffering that occurs on occasions like this. A favorite one is the loss of a limb. Mine is equally simple: to lose Timothy was to fall precipitously into a deep black hole. It was a hole of darkness, numbness, despair, and waves of excruciating pain. I had lost a friend, a counselor, a soulmate, a fellow-traveler, a spiritual companion, and a conversation partner; and, above all else, I had lost my firstborn son.” (William Abraham)

“So the healing I hoped for did not come. Instead we got death and grief and a black hole of darkness *surrounded* paradoxically by providence.” (William Abraham)

I. Voices of the City (19)

- A. The whole town is humming with conversation about them.

“I find it hard to take in what anyone says.... It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me....” (C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*)

- B. “Is this Naomi?”

- C. Ambiguity in the Reader’s Experience

D. No doubt Ruth, the Moabites, stirred some conversations.

“The reunion with friends could not alleviate [Naomi’s] feelings of forsakenness. At the mention of her name with its connotation of ‘pleasantness,’ Naomi took the opportunity to pour out her heart to the women of Bethlehem. Rather than providing her with a reason for celebration, Naomi’s return to her homeland became the setting for a strong and bitter complaint against her God, who she believed had treated her badly.” (James McKeown, THOTC)

II. Voices of Sorrow (20-21)

A. Sorrow’s voice is often bitter.

“Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be— or so it feels— welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.... Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble? I tried to put some of these thoughts to C. this afternoon. He reminded me that the same thing seems to have happened to Christ: ‘Why hast thou forsaken me?’... Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.’” (C.S. Lewis)

i. Job 2:10

ii. Hearing the Voice of Grief

“For me it makes no intellectual or theological sense whatsoever to get mad or angry at God. Of course, emotionally and psychologically it makes sense when we get angry at God in these circumstances. However, it makes no coherent or intellectual sense given what I believe about God; and I have not had the slightest temptation to do so....

“I found every philosophical or theological move utterly empty in wrestling with the problem of the loss of my son. The bottom line is that I wanted Timothy back here; I wanted him back even if I had to spend the rest of my own life tending to his needs. Nothing by way of comment or explanation brought comfort, relief, or intellectual peace....

“My experience of Timothy’s death took the family and me across a threshold of grief and agony where you simply hit rock bottom. The experience speaks for itself as the worst that one will ever have to face. There is nothing below it; it is darkness all the way down. The subjective experience in all its brutality does not allow for an objective account that can trump it in the scale of misery and pain....

“One of the deep effects of the grief that ensues on the death of a loved one— in my case, the death of my beloved son Timothy— is that one’s cognitive capacities are simply overwhelmed. So much so that beliefs and convictions that common sense would say should make a difference fail to do so. This does not mean that grieving as a Christian will not [look different] from that of the unbeliever. As Paul notes, we do not grieve like certain pagans may do, that is, without hope. However, we cannot pretend that this overrides what I described as entering a black hole where one’s convictions fail to register in the sense that they fail to alleviate the depth of one’s grief in the loss, say, of a beloved son.”

(William Abraham)

B. Speaking to people in grief.

God certainly doesn’t step in to correct Naomi... He steps in to bless her. To reveal to her that He was present and working.

C. Naomi has experienced bitterness, and her words taste bitter.