

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:2:2005

Reading: Ruth 1:1-13

2. ON THE ROAD HOMEWARD

The American poet Henry Longfellow wrote these words,

*“ Be still, sad heart, and cease repining
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining
Thy fate is the common fate of all
Into each life some rain must fall,”*

For these three widows in Moab the storm of sorrow and trial was coming down in torrents. It wasn't just that

“ some rain,” was falling. They were in the midst of a deluge. We are told in (1:5) that *“ the woman was left.”*

What a sad state. Alone in the midst of a country of strangers. Naomi had accompanied her husband and her sons, having no option, into the land of Moab. But now Naomi was desolate. *“ The woman was left.”* There is nothing the human heart dreads so much as the thought of being utterly alone. Everyone longs to have a human hand in theirs in the great crisis and trials of life. Thankfully, there is One, *the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,* who has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us, even when we faint by the way and fail Him in our fidelity. Although Naomi was in a country of idolatry where false gods as Chemosh (Num 21:29) were worshipped she still had a vital interest in the land of Judah. Evidently, there were lines of communication kept open by her with the Lord's people in the land of Judah which was home to her.

(1:21) Then the first ray of light and hope appeared. A remarkable rumour reached this lonely, bitter woman,

“ the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.” The famine was over !

The land was

flourishing ! The fields were fruitful. Naomi longed to go home. But can you imagine the questions that must have coursed through her mind. *“ Do you think I could go back now ? I wonder if anyone would remember me ? How would I be received ?”* Its very interesting to notice the names by which God reveals Himself in the Book of Ruth.

In this book God is made known as,

Elohim (1:16) “ *the Triune God.*”

Jehovah (1:8) “ *He that is, and that was, and that is to come.*”

El Shaddai (1:21) “ *The Almighty. All Sufficient.*

Jehovah the Lord (1:21) “ *The Everlasting One.*”

Jehovah Elohim (2:12) “ *The Lord God.*”

Now in the opening verses of (Ch 1) we see *God working in Government.* The Lord chastening a family.

Yet it is very interesting to notice the word that Naomi uses in God’s dealing with her. Did you notice (1:21)

Do you see that word “ *Almighty,*” its *El Shaddai.*

Dr. Campbell Morgan states, “ *the name El Shaddai is peculiarly suggestive meaning literally, the Mighty One of Sufficiency.*” Do you recall that it was in a time of crisis that God appeared to Abram and said, “ *I am the Almighty God walk before me and be thou perfect.*”

(Gen 17:1) The word is “ *El Shaddai.*” Its an arresting fact that out of the 48 mentions of this lovely name 31 are found in the Book of Job. My in no other part of the Word of God is the tender love of *El Shaddai* more evident than to the one who so oppressed. You see, every believer who knows Him as *El Shaddai* will find comfort in times of testing, and in the end will bless the hand that guided.

Now if in the opening verses we see the *God of Government,* then in these verses we see the *God of Goodness* for the section opens with,

(1) A GRACIOUS VISITATION

Look if you will at (1:6) The Hebrew word translated

“ *visited,*” in our text is sometimes used in a judgement sense in Scripture as well as a blessing sense. The context of the Scripture will determine if it is judgement or blessing. The Book of Job speaks of a visitation of Divine Judgement when it says, “ *He hath visited in His anger.*” (35:15) But this is a visitation of Divine Blessing for it’s a visitation that brought bread. God visited His faithful people in Bethlehem but not His disobedient people in Moab. Naomi heard the report that the famine had ended, and when she heard the good news she decided to return home. *Is it not sad when people only hear about God’s blessing, but never experience it, because they are not in the place where God can bless them ?* Some years ago at a prayer meeting a number of Youth for Christ leaders were present. Jacob Stam was there on that occasion and the folk had been asking God to bless the ministry and the word “ *bless,*” was used scores of times as they prayed.

Then Jacob Stam got up and prayed, “ *Lord we have been asking you to bless all these things, but please, Lord make us blessable.*” My had Naomi been in that

meeting, she would have had to confess, “*Lord, I’m not blessing.*” Are you blessing? Are you in the place where God can bless you? You see, whenever we have disobeyed the Lord and departed from His will, we must confess our sin and return to the place of blessing.

Abraham had to leave Egypt and go back to the altar he had abandoned. (Gen 13:-4) Jacob had to go back to Bethel (Gen 35:1) and Naomi had to return to Bethlehem. So we read “*then she arose.*” Do you know something? The true child of God always wants to come back. And God brings His people back by one way or another. (Gen 8:6-9) Here we find that raven and the dove both went out, perhaps together. The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot but the raven did. It found rest on the putrid carcasses that were floating on the face of the deep. On these the raven could find both food and rest, and why? Because it was a raven. But the dove found neither rest or food and why? Because it was a dove. ***They had got two different natures.*** The one came back but the other never did. Is this not a picture of professing Christianity? Sometimes I fear that a good many ravens have crept into the church. Then some great trial comes. The raven and the dove both seem to go, but the one never comes back, while the other does. For the true child of God can find no rest and no food in the world. So we read of Naomi “*she went away,*”

“*then she arose.*” “*She went forth out of the place where she was.*” (1:6-7) In Ruth (Ch 1) we have a Prodigal Family, in (Luke Ch 15) we have a Prodigal Son. Now what moved Naomi to return? Was it the sorrow of loneliness and loss? No!

It was the good news from the far country that created a thirst in her soul to go forth from the place where she was. You see, “*the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.*” Now when we turn to the Word of God we discover that the Lord visited His people in different times and in different ways. For example the Lord visited His people in,

(a) ***THE PLENTITUDE OF HIS GRACE:***

Here it was a visitation that brought bread. And any visitation from God that brings blessing is a visitation of God’s grace. My can you imagine the triple sorrow of Naomi in Moab? Three graves in a strange country. Pleasantness becomes bitterness. Within one household are three widows bearing burdens of loneliness, tears and anxiety. The question on Naomi’s heart would be

“***Does Jehovah care?***” Yes, she was still the object of His care and soon she would know His love which has no limit and His grace which has no measure. Do

you recall Israel in Egypt ? (Exod 2:23) Do you see the picture we have of the People ? “ they sighed, they cried, they were groaning,” (2:23) they were marked by affliction and sorrow. (3:7) Is that a picture of you this ? Could it be that sorrow, trial, affliction has crossed your pathway ? Does God know ? Does the Lord understand ? Does He care ? Well, do you see the picture we have of the Lord ? Look at (2:24) “ *God heard, God remembered,*” look at (3:6) “ *God sees, God knows.*”

Frank Graff was a Methodist minister in the Philadelphia area from 1850 until his death in 1890. He was known as the sunshine minister because of his happy disposition and his optimistic faith. But at one period in his life he went through a deep valley. He lost his joy and radiancy and was overwhelmed with depression. Then one day he began to sing, “ *What a friend*,” he fell on his knees and the peace of the Lord began to flood his heart and mind afresh. As a result of that experience he wrote these words,

***“ Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth and song
As the burdens press and the cares distress
And the way grows weary and long,
Oh, yes He cares I know He cares
His heart is touched with my grief
When the day is weary the long night dreary
I know my Saviour cares.”***

My here in Egypt was the Lord visiting His people, for God says to Moses in (1:16) Sometimes the Lord calms ***the storm for the man***. Do you recall when the Saviour and the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee ? The storm arose and the fearful disciples awakened the Lord Jesus and said, “ *Master carest thou not that we perish ?*” (Mk 4:38) They were asking what you have asked, “ *Lord do you really care ?*” Mark tells us “ *And he arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace be still.*” The Lord calming the storm for the man. But often the ***Lord calms the man for the storm***. Peter was facing a terrible storm. His life was in danger. Herod had killed James and he now had apprehended Peter. Peter was next on the execution list. My how would you feel if you knew that your life was too be take from you tomorrow ?

Would you sleep tonight ? Peter did. He calmly rested under the shadow of God’s wings. He slept like a baby.

Why ? (Acts 12:6) Because he knew God's sustaining grace. (a)

(b) IN THE PERSON OF HIS SON:

Dr. Luke says, “ *The dayspring from on high hath visited us.* ” (1:78) This was a reference to Christ as the Messiah. (Is 60:1-3 Rev 22:16) Paul says, “ *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.* ”

(2 Cor 5:19) You see, our minds are drawn onward from the history of Boaz and Ruth at Bethlehem to that of the Lord Jesus, who was the true Bread who came in grace to Bethlehem. Have you caught the wonder of this ? Do you rejoice in the truth of this ? God hath visited us in the Person of His Son, who said, “ *I am the bread of life.* ” (Jn 6:37) Did you notice those words in (1:6) ? “ *the Lord hath visited His people in giving them bread.* ” It was a free gift, you did not deserve it, work for it, pay for it. “ *For by grace boast.* ” (Eph 2:8) My the fact that God hath visited His people is the great reason for man's return to Him. (a)(b)

(c) IN THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT:

In our land we have reason to be profoundly grateful to God for His visitations in the past through which He has signally blessed this land. The Sixmilewater Awakening in 1625, the 1859 Revival and the movement of the Spirit of God in the 1920's under the preaching of

W.P. Nicholson. Do you know something ? Revival often begins with one man.

Do you remember

Nehemiah ? *A man whose heart was burdened, a man whose knees were bent, a man whose Bible was opened.*

For the cry of the people in Nehemiah's day was “ *bring the book.* ” (8:1) You see, whenever there is a visitation of the Spirit of God there is a renewed emphasis not on the words of men, but on the Word of God, which is the Bread of Life. In the days of Nehemiah they had a hunger for the Word, in the days of the Early Church, the priority was the ministry of the Word and Prayer.

(Acts 6:4) Back to Ruth. It says “ *the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.* ” Does that not imply that there was at least a godly remnant who sought the face of God for his mercy and cleansing ? For as we saw last time barrenness is the result of sin, but blessing is the outcome of confession. (Deut 28:1) (1) My do we not need it ? The question is, have you got to the place of confession and brokenness before God ? (1)

(2) A DUBIOUS PROCLAMATION

Now an oriental parting never took place within the home. Rather the parting guest was always accompanied some distance along the road. So here we have three women starting out on the road to Bethlehem, but all of them do not get there. My have we not here a picture of humanity divided into three classes ? Some like Naomi are backsliders, believers yes, but they are in hospital. Some are like Orpah, unsaved, spiritually dead and in the morgue. But then there are others like Ruth who have come not only to trust under the Lord's wings (2:12) but also to work in his field. Now here we see Naomi,

(a) MAKING A RIGHT DECISION:

Look if you will at (1:7) and (1:19) says “ *and so they went until they came to Bethlehem.* ” A new beginning !

The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings. I have met people who try to convince me they are always on a mountaintop. But I've noticed that you cannot have mountaintops unless you have valleys.

We all have to make new beginnings don't we ? Some of God's choicest people in the Bible had to go back. How can you be restored to fellowship ? My go back to the place where you left the Lord. For He did not leave you you left Him. Do you recall what the Risen Lord said to the church at Ephesus ? That church that had left its first love ! He says, “ *Remember, therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works.* ” (Rev 2:5)

A couple were driving home from church one evening. The wife was sitting in the front seat on the far left side. Her husband was in his usual place behind the steering wheel. Seemingly a large gulf separated them. With lonely eyes she looked at him and said, “ *Dear do you remember when we first met, how close we used to sit to each other. You used to put your arm around me. What has happened to those days ?* ” With one hand firmly attached to the steering wheel and the other resting on the empty space between them, he said, “ *well, I haven't moved.* ” You see, the distance was not because he moved. A separation had occurred because she had moved away. This is what had happened to Naomi. But now she was coming home. She was going back to the place where she had left the Lord. My do you need to do that ? Has your love for the Lord cooled ? Has your ministry become mechanical ? Has your relationship become routine ? (a) then we see Naomi,

(b) GIVING A WRONG DIRECTION:

Look at (1:8-10) Can you see here,

1. Naomi's Advice:

In (1:8) “ *Go return,*” in (1:11) “ *Turn again my daughters,*” in (1:12) the same thing. Naomi tried to get rid of her daughters in law. Maybe you feel like that about your daughters in law also. But why did she want to do this ? Why did Naomi a believer in the true and living God want to send her daughters-in-law back to Moab where they would be worshipping idols ? I wonder was she trying to get rid of the evidence ? Was she ashamed to bring to Bethlehem living evidences of her backsliding ? You see, not only had she gone to Moab which was bad enough, but she had permitted her sons to marry the woman of Moab, and this of course was contrary to the Word of God. (Deut 7:1-3 Ezra 9:1)

So she tried to get rid of Orpah and Ruth. ***She tried to cover up.*** Is this what you are doing ? Instead of coming clean with God are you trying to get rid of the evidence and proof that you have been out of the will of God ? The Bible says, “ *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*” (Prov 28:13) Here's Naomi out of touch with God wanting to send her daughters-in-law back to idolatry and immorality. Do you know something ? Its dangerous to listen to the advice of a backslidden believer. In fact, a backslidden believer can do more damage than an unsaved person. For you never find a professing Christian getting into the wrong place without doing great damage to the Lord's name and work. 1.

2. Naomi's Appreciation:

(1:8) Do you see that word kindness ? (*Hesed*) its used again by Boaz concerning Ruth in (3:10) David uses the same expression when he said of Mephibosheth,

“ *I will show him kindness.*” (2 Sam 9:1) You see, these Moabitish girls had lived in a sinful environment which was marked by idolatry and immorality. They had entered a family of Israelites where the law of God was honoured. “ *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,*”

“ *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*” My it is obvious that they were influenced by this and had proved dutiful wives and kind daughters in law. How are you getting on with your daughters in law ? Do you appreciate them ? Do you encourage them or slag them off ? Now I know you think they are not good enough for your son, but then your daughters mother-in-law thinks the same. 1, 2,

3. Naomi's Aspiration:

Look if you will at (1:9) “ *Rest*, ” here spoke of marriage and its many advantages for women. (3:1)

Incidentally those two words in (1:9) form one of two divisions of the Book of Ruth. Look at (2:2)

1. “ *Find Grace*, ” Chapters 1 & 2

2. “ *Find Rest*, ” Chapters 3 & 4

You see, the burden of Naomi’s prayer was that they might find a new home. But what value are the prayers of a backslidden believer ? Do you recall the words of the psalmist ? “ *If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.* ” (Ps 66:18) Yet is Naomi’s prayer not the aspiration of many a Christian parent ? For next to God’s salvation, finding the right partner for life is the big quest. Tell me, have you made a matter of definite earnest prayer ? 1, 2, 3

4. Naomi’s Affection:

“ Then she kissed them, ” this is truly a womanly scene. There they stand and they’re weeping. They have their handkerchief’s out. J. Vernon McGee calls this “ *the weeping of the handkerchief brigade.* ” Is it not something precious to see genuine affection in a family ?

Naomi cares for them, they care for her, each cares for each other ! But now Naomi must set before them the cost of their continuance in the pathway of companionship. So we see here not only (1) (2) but,

(3) A RIGOROUS EXAMINATION

Here are three women standing at the crossroads in the land of Moab and Naomi just tells them how it is. “ *If you go with me, you can never get married. My people couldn’t identify themselves with you. It’d be too costly.*

You’ll really be outcasts because we don’t have any dealings with the Moabites. ”

In effect Naomi says to them if you come with me,

(a) THERE WOULD BE NO FAMILY:

Look at (1:11) Now to understand Naomi’s reasoning we need to think of the custom of their day which was known as the “ *levirate*, ” marriage. This had to do with the brother marrying the wife of his deceased brother. This custom was practiced from early times and was incorporated into the Law of Moses. (Deut 25:5) So can you understand Naomi’s reasoning now ? She’s simply saying that if

they follow her, the levirate marriage opportunity is practically nil. “ *Why will ye go with me ?* ” They should stay instead in Moab where they could easily get a husband the normal way. (a)

(b) *THERE WOULD BE NO FUTURE:*

Do you see what she says in (1:12) In effect Naomi says, “ *Even if I had more sons, which I never will, but if I did would you wait for them to grow up ? Why, you’d be robbing the cradle ? You wouldn’t want to do that.* ” Do you see what Naomi is saying ? “ *Girls before you come with me count the cost, for coming with me will mean dying to your own interests.* ” Is this not how the Lord Jesus challenged His would be followers ?

Turn to (Lk 9:57-62) Here are three would be followers of the Lord.

1. *Candidate No 1: The Too Fast Follower:*

“ *Lord I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,* ”

(9:57) Others might hesitate but not this man. My if we had someone coming up to us like this on Sunday night we would be delighted. But Christ says, “ *Not too fast Sir, for the Son of Man who you are so eager to follow has nowhere to lay His head.* ” Now what about your offer ? My as you a follower of the Lamb are you ready to be despised, even made homeless ?

2. *Candidate No 2: The Too Slow Follower:*

Look if you will at (9:59) Here was a man who was willing to go but not yet. “ *Lord I will follow you but I have many earthly ties to which I am now devoted. I’ll come when my father is dead.* ” My is there a “ **but,** ” in your response to the demands of discipleship ? “ *Lord I will follow Thee but not just yet, not till my folk are well fixed for the future.* ” “ *Lord I will follow Thee but sure the world needs Christian teachers, doctors, nurses.* ” “ *Lord I will follow Thee but not until I have some financial security.* ” Is this you ?

3. *Candidate No 3: The Too Soft Follower:*

(9:61) Do you see the Lord’s reply ? (9:62) Christ is saying, “ *You cannot serve Me with a divided heart I must have all your heart.* ” The Lord Jesus puts it like this “ *If any man come to Me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* ” (Lk 14:26) The word “ *hate,* ” means to “ *love less.* ” if we are going to

be His disciples we must love Him with a love that is deeper than the love wherewith we love our dearest and nearest. In other words, Christ must come first in our affections. Is He first in your heart before everything else ? Do you love Him above all ? Evidently Naomi had left her first love. She says, “ *the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.* ” (1:13) Would you rather be in the hollow of His hand or have His hand against you ? In (2 Kings 3:14-16) “ *the hand of the Lord came upon him.* ” That is Elijah. In (Acts 11:21) “ *the hand of the Lord was with them,* ” that is the disciples. But here in (1:13) *the hand of the Lord was against her.* That is Naomi. My **the hand of the Lord may be upon you, with you, or against you.** It was against Naomi for she had left her first love. What about you ? Augustine said, “ *We love not Christ at all unless we love Him above all.* ” (Matt 10:37) A young Christian girl came to speak to her pastor. The Lord had been exercising her heart about the mission field. The pastor began to put her through a rigorous examination. “ *Are you prepared to leave home and loved ones, forego some of the things you are used with back home ? What about loneliness ? Have you taken into consideration that you might suffer for the sake of the gospel ?* ”

All these questions the girl had thought of. Finally he said to her, “ *Are you prepared to forego marriage, kids, a family for the sake of Christ ?* ” She replied, “ *Yes in the early hours of this morning I got that question resolved and by His grace I mean to follow Him all the days of my life.* ”

“ We love not Christ at all unless we love Him above all.” Do you love Him above all ?