

Finding Hope in the Midst of Despair

Ruth 1:20-21

20 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" NKJV

Have you ever been where Naomi was when she made this statement. You see the name Naomi means pleasant while the name Mara means bitter. What she is saying is that once I was a pleasant person but now my life is bitter. And she lays the whole matter in the Lord's hands. It was Him, He was to blame. For some unknown reason God had something against her and was making her pay for it now. That is how she saw it anyway.

Isn't that how we often see it? God is out to get us, to get even for something that we did. And we have all done plenty worth getting even for, haven't we?

People in Naomi's spot commit two mistakes. First, they assume they know why things go wrong in their lives. Second, they do not know the real purpose of God in what He is doing in our lives.

Now let's step back and look at the big picture. If you read your readings this week we covered some pretty rough territory. Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel are the setting of the book of Ruth. Ruth was lived toward the close of the book of Judges.

Wow was that a bazaar book or what? People killing people with the jawbone of a donkey. A man who cut up his concubine into pieces and sent her all over the country.

And how many times did the Lord send other nations to afflict His people. Maybe that is where Naomi got the idea that God was judging her for some unknown sin.

But when the people were really down and being persecuted and afflicted they would repent of their sin and call out to the Lord and He would raise them up a judge to bring deliverance. That was pretty good, right?

But then, after the people had enjoyed the prosperity from the Lord for a number of years they would once again turn to worship other gods. And then the process would start all over again. They had a memory problem.

So what I want to do this morning is to take the case of Naomi and compare it with the national problem of Israel. And see if we cannot see ourselves in the story.

- I. The Despair.
 - A. Despair can come from most anywhere at any time.
 - B. For Naomi the despair was real.
 1. Things were not well in Judah, but she had a good family.
 2. So they decided to go to Moab and seek a better life, an easier life.

- a. Everything went well for a while.
 - b. Her sons took wives from among the Moabites and all was well.
 - c. But then her husband died, but she still had her sons.
 - d. But they died also, so Naomi was a broken woman.
 - e. What would she do now, a foreigner in the land, without even any offspring from her husband left.
 - f. She decides to go home, back to Judah, where she at least has friends and family that maybe will have compassion on her.
 - g. Since neither of her daughter-in-laws have children she expects to leave them in their own land among their own people so they can make the best of their lives that they can.
 - h. But Ruth did more than marry a man, she found a new family as well as a new God and she will not give them up, so she will return to Judah with Naomi.
 - i. So Naomi's despair was real.
- 3. For some the despair is manufactured.
 - a. Oh, my iphone isn't getting reception here.
 - b. Oh, someone put a scratch in my new car.
 - 4. Sometimes despair is directly related to what we have done.
 - a. There is the law of cause and affect.
 - b. You reap what you sow the Bible says.

II. The Cause of the Despair.

A. From our point of view.

- 1. Naomi cannot see what God is doing.
- 2. It is all too painful for her as she goes through it.
- 3. It seem senseless.
- 4. But she knows that God could change it if He wanted to but He does not and that is what makes her say the things that she does.
- 5. Faith is easy in prosperity, but difficult when things go wrong.
- 6. Part of life is like hide-and-seek, God does not always make His reasons known to us, but wants us to seek the answers from Him.

B. From God's point of view.

1. God has seen the end, He knows how it all turns out, and for His people He is working it that way.
 - a. Ro 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.
2. God is not figuring things out as we go along.
 - a. Do you think that God did not know from the beginning that Gideon would defeat thousands with only 300 men.
 - b. Do you suppose that God was surprised that Shamgar would slay 600 of the enemy with only an ox goad? No I am sure that Shamgar was surprised but God was not.
 - c. Do you suppose that God was amazed that Samson would take the jawbone of a donkey and slay 1000 of Israel's enemies, not.
 - d. Each time that Israel fell into sin and God brought those to afflict them, God already knew how it was all going to turn out.
 - e. There has never been a drought that caught God off guard.
 - f. Never been a storm that God was not aware of.
3. Now we have a problem with that, just like Naomi did.
 - a. If God knows it is going to happen why does He not step it and stop it.
 - b. I guess we can say that it is not God's purpose to do that.
 - c. Now that does not make God responsible for what happens, sometimes bad things happen, but God will take those bad things and make good things out of them.
 - d. We just need to have faith and wait patiently on Him.

III. God can bring a blessing from anything, anywhere, any time.

- A. In today's reading Jonathan and his armor bearer are the catalyst that led to the defeat of the enemy because he said, "For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." 1 Sam 14:6 NKJV

IV. What then is our hope.

- A. In government?
1. If you think that the government is the answer to our questions, then you have been reading the wrong history books.

2. Especially today when government has divorced itself from any semblance of morality and godliness
- B. In ourselves?
1. Aren't we the ones that got ourselves into this mess.
 2. Pr 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.
- C. In taking matters into our own hands, instead of waiting on God.
1. Pr 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;