

# Are You Angry with God?

*Book of Ruth*

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**Bible Text:** Ruth 1:19-22  
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We come to the last four verses of chapter 1. Our focus is going to be Ruth 1:19-22. That's the text for today's message. The title is a question and so the title is "Are You Angry with God?" Are you angry with God? There are perhaps a few here today who would say, "Yes, I am. I am angry with God." Probably more of us would say, "No, I'm not angry with God. I know better than to be angry with God." But is that really accurate? I would suggest to you that anger with God is in a very real sense, an inevitable consequence of living in a fallen world filled with suffering and pain and disappointment with a darkened mind which we as believers, even though the Lord has given us eyes to see and ears to hear and a new heart, we still have the old man and the old man interprets things wrongly and so when the old man, our old sin nature looks at our lives, when we encounter disappointments, when we encounter tragic circumstances, unexpected delays, unexpected changes of plans, the natural bent of the fallen nature is to be angry and I would suggest to you that we're angry often. It's kind of a natural thing. I mean, when things don't go our way, the first tendency is anger and so how do you overcome that as a Christian. That's what we're going to talk about. How do you put off anger and put on joyful submission to the Lord.

We can be angry with God over small things, our plans don't go the way we want them, and we say things that betray our attitudes, our doubts. You know, things like if you want it to rain, plan a picnic. Have you said something like that before? I know I have or something like that. Sure it rained because we had planned a picnic. What is that really saying? It's saying we're frustrated with the way God is doing his business. We're not happy with it. When we hear of some difficult circumstance for someone we love and we in our hearts are frustrated with that, we're really angry with God. Now, what we've got to do as Christians is continually put off those wrong thoughts and replace them with biblical godly thoughts, but anger with God is a natural condition for sinners who live in a fallen world where the world, as I said earlier, is filled with suffering and pain and disappointment.

So sin is a major reason for anger with God, also our finiteness is a major reason that we're angry with God because our finiteness, our limitedness. We don't have enough perspective, we don't see the whole picture and so this inevitably leads us toward that wrong conclusion of being frustrated and angry with God's ways. An illustration of this,

if you think about it, imagine you're walking into an art gallery and you see pictures on the wall, oil paintings, watercolors, maybe there are some cross-stitch there, there is all kinds of different beautiful art and you happen to see the work table of the art gallery owner and there it is with frames laying aside and there is this piece of fabric lying on the table like it's about to be framed; a frame there and it's not yet been mounted but it's ready to be mounted. And you look at that piece of fabric and what you see is a piece of fabric with a jumbled mess of threads of various colors interwoven in a chaotic and disordered fashion and you think to yourself, "Who would want to frame that?" That's how we look at our lives because if you turn that piece of fabric over, that disordered mess of multi-colored threads interwoven in this chaotic, no semblance of order, if you turn it over, it's a tapestry. The problem is we see the other side of the tapestry in our limited, finite nature. God sees the tapestry that he is weaving.

So I invite you this morning to consider a woman who is not so very different than us, Naomi, the main character of the book of Ruth. We've noted that before, she really is the one who speaks more, she is the focus more even than Ruth, though the book is named after Ruth. I invite you to consider Naomi, her circumstances and a woman who is going through very hard trials and who is very angry with God and we see that anger erupt in our passage this morning.

Now, what I want to do is I want to read verses from 14 to the end of the chapter to give a little bit of context and remember just if you weren't with us before, if you're not familiar with this story, Naomi moved with her husband and two sons to the land of Moab; we're told this in the first 13 verses. While they were there, her husband died, her two sons married Moabite women and they died before they had had children. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law are without a man and to be without a man is to be without a future at that point in time in history; no way to care for themselves essentially.

So their circumstances are desperate and last week we focused on what happened to her daughter-in-law Ruth and I want to read that passage to get us in the context of verses 19 to 22. I'll begin reading at verse 14. After Naomi has encouraged them to leave it says,

14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. 19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 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, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" 22 So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the

Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you by your Spirit might do that which is impossible for us, you might illumine our minds and our hearts to understand your word and to apply it rightly, to repent, and to obey, that we might be people who are more joyful servants of our sovereign and loving God. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I want us to consider this subject under three points this morning, really three questions, about anger with God. The first question is: where does it come from? Where does being angry with God come from? Where does it come from? And I've alluded to it a little bit in the introduction but I want to just hit this again. There are two basic things I want us to look at that I think we can see in Naomi's life. The first is: it comes from an inability to see things as they truly are. We become angry with God because we are unable to see things as they truly are. If we saw things as they truly are, we would never ever be angry with God. Anger with God is a function of not seeing things as they truly are. From our imperfect vantage point, our faulty perception, we see things wrongly and we interpret our circumstances wrongly and therefore we become angry.

Now, this inability to see things as they truly are starts out with us at birth because unbelievers cannot see at all spiritually. Unbelievers before you come to know Christ, they are angry with God almost by definition. Anytime something goes wrong, it's anger with God because they're blind. It's not that they need to see better, they can't see at all. That's why the Scripture says and Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. He who has eyes to see, let him see." We need God to give us eyes to see and ears to hear. We come into the world not seeing. In fact, that was one of the key things in John's Gospel which we looked at before Ruth. In John 9, the man born blind was really healed by Jesus to be a metaphor and John picks this up in his Gospel, a metaphor of what every single person is spiritually: we are all born spiritually blind like that man was born physically blind and we need to be touched by Jesus Christ so that we can see.

So unbelievers can't see because they're blind but believers who have been given eyes to see still lack the ability to see clearly because of the darkening of our understanding. Our minds are darkened by sin and so we can't see as we ought to see. Naomi is missing things that are right before her eyes here. It's interesting, there's kind of a spiritual farsightedness, I think, to the Christian life. I see things better out there than I see here. I can see your sin with great clarity, not always, but a lot better than I can see mine. And theologically, I can see how the truths of God as I read the word, hold together better as I think about it theoretically or out here. It becomes harder to see it when I bring it close to me in my own life and my own experience and I need God to help me see better.

So where does it come from? It comes from an inability to see things as they truly are. That's the first sub point under this first major point. Where does it come from? 1A. Inability to see things as they truly are. Secondly, it comes from the disconnectedness of

our theology and our life which is kind of a symptom of the first problem but it's something so fundamental that we need to talk about it, the disconnect between our theology and our life. We're going to see that Naomi has pretty good theology but she has a complete inability in this circumstance to apply her theology to her circumstances. She believes that God is sovereign. She makes this very clear. We saw this last time in her dialogue with her two daughters-in-law when she blesses them. She says, "May the LORD deal kindly with you." She is telling them, "Go home. Go back to Moab. I'm going to Bethlehem. It's hopeless to go with me. Go back to Moab and may the LORD deal kindly with you." And that was a great statement of faith, her theology. She believed that Yahweh was Lord even over Moab. He was God even in Moab, don't worry about Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. He is not God, Yahweh is God and so she asks Yahweh to bless them. Her theology is sound. She believes in the sovereignty of God. She's going to make clear in her complaints that she makes, these rude comments and remarks she makes to her neighbors and friends that she has not seen in maybe 15 years, "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. He is the one that is behind my circumstances." Well, truth be told, she's right. God in his word makes clear that he is absolutely sovereign. In the Canon that she had at this time in history, even the Torah makes that clear. I mean, Joseph had said about the circumstances that happened to him, "You meant it for evil," to his brothers, "but God meant it for Good. God brought about this great salvation." You see, everything that happens is under the hand of Yahweh, under the hand of the Almighty and so she had that theology.

She also believed that God was good. She said to her daughters-in-law, "May the LORD deal kindly with you," and we noted that that's one of the key words in all of the Old Testament, the word "chesed" which is God's "lovingkindness; his tender hearted mercy; his love." It's actually, in some sense, God's chesed is akin almost to...it's the Old Testament statement, one theologian has written, it's the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament "God is love." "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in," chesed, "in lovingkindness; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands," Exodus 34:6-7. She knew God's chesed was a part of who he is and so she asked the Lord to be kind to them. So she believes God is sovereign and he's kind, he's just not kind to me. That's what she believes. You see, her theology is disconnected from her life. He's sovereign and he's kind but for some reason he is being a bear to me.

So that's where it comes from, it comes from the inability to see things as they are and a disconnectedness between our theology and our life. Now, the second question: what does it look like? Anger with God, what does it look like? We looked at where it comes from, now what does it look like? And we see it play out in the narrative before us in these four verses. So let's observe the text and watch the action unfold before us and let me encourage you as we do this, this is something that is really helpful when you're studying a passage of Scripture, especially one that's familiar to you, is to try to imagine you're reading it for the first time so that you can regain a sense of surprise that you would have had the first time you read it, okay? So when we read this, try to imagine you're reading it for the first time in the sense of let's think about it as though we don't know what's about to happen next, okay?

So, verse 19, after the painful parting with Orpah and Ruth's amazing statement of faith in the previous passage, "Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people. Your God, my God. And may the LORD do worse to me if I don't keep this. May Yahweh," she's calling Yahweh her God. We saw last time, the title of our message was "Surprised By Joy." It's Ruth's salvation and the reader reading it is struck by that but Naomi seems to be oblivious to it. She's not seeing that. And we continue and what you're going to see in verses 19 to 22 is there is this subtle and beautiful contrast that the author is painting between what he's showing us, his perception of Naomi's circumstances, the narrator, and Naomi's own perception of her circumstances.

Now, watch how this plays out. Verse 19, "So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem." Now the first thing is, they both went. Literally in the Hebrew: so they went, both of them, until they came to Bethlehem. So they went, really better even, the two of them. It's interesting that the word "two" is repeated a number of times in the first chapter, actually seven times in chapter 1. You have in verse 1, the man went to sojourn in the land of Moab, his wife and his two sons. Verse 2, the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. Verse 3, she was left with her two sons. Verse 5, then both, really it should, then the two of them, Mahlon and Chilion, also died and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. Verse 7, her two daughters-in-law. Verse 8, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law. So those are the first seven times the occurrence of the "two" and now the eighth time here in verse 19, so they went, the two of them. He's seeing these groups of two: two sons; two sons; two daughters-in-law; two daughters-in-law. She's trying to send them home, she's going to be alone but the author is suddenly reminding us she's not alone. She thinks she is but she's not. There is Ruth right beside her.

Then they came to Bethlehem. Note the emphasis, "they went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem." Do you see the repetition? It's unnecessary but it's there for emphasis. We do this when we want to emphasize something. The author wants us to see they have come to Bethlehem. In fact, the same verb and the same name occur three times. Verse 22 even, you have it echoed again. It ends with, "And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." Three times we're reminded they came to Bethlehem.

The emphasis is to the superlative degree and so the reader listening to that and hearing, "came to Bethlehem, came to Bethlehem, came to Bethlehem," what does the word "Bethlehem" mean? The Hebrew word literally and the original audience would have heard "House of Bread." Beth-lechem. House of Bread. "They came to the House of Bread. And when they had come to the House of Bread," then after he says a little bit more about the whole dialogue, then he says, "and they came to the House of Bread." Well, one of the great concerns for us in reading this and the great concern for Naomi and her two daughters was they need food, they need bread and they have come to the House of Bread. You see, what we're seeing is Naomi sees a world that is completely dark. Her

circumstances, it is the darkest dark before the dawn, and she's not seeing any semblance of light. That's what she's going to testify to real clearly in just a moment.

But we the reader see the glimmer of dawn is already starting. It's the two of them. They're in Bethlehem. They're back home in the Promise Land. They're in the House of Bread. In fact, that idea of not just being in the House of Bread so that they have food, she's home. This is her home. How good it is to come home, especially after you've been gone for years. Isn't it amazing to come home. You know, wherever you're born, you basically think that's...most people, I guess if you were born in some places, maybe you don't feel this way. But most people feel like that their home is the most beautiful area, where they were born, where they were raised. You know, that's the Promised Land, so-to-speak. If you're born on the East Coast and you're used to trees and you go out West and there are no trees, or you go out to LA, where you guys came from, and everything is brown except for where they are watering things continually. And it's pretty in its own way but there is something good about coming home. Well, if you were from LA, you'd feel the opposite way, I guess. You can be foolish and feel that way. But it's home. It's what you're used to. It's what you think is beautiful.

So she's come back home after at least ten years, probably more like 15 years away. Here she comes and she's home. And not only that, the emphasis of being home is heightened because of the response. "So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them." There's a powerful word here, "was stirred" pictures kind of an uproar. It's a word which is onomatopoeic which means that it's communicating the noisiness of the situation and so the idea is joyful excitement. In fact, this word is used in 1 Kings 1:45 of the uproar when Solomon was acclaimed to be king. It's used in 1 Samuel 4 where the ark of the covenant, remember after they lose the first battle with the Philistines, then the ark of the covenant is brought into the camp and the Israelites now think, "We're going to win." Of course, they don't end up winning but they think they're going to and so the ark of the covenant comes in and there is a great sense of joy and expectancy and this word is used. They are stirred again. So what he's saying is Naomi and Ruth, these two widows that would appear to be helpless and hopeless, now are home and not only are they in the town that's familiar to them, but the people there remember them.

It's nice to come home to a welcome. There was no way to call ahead and say, "Hey, we're gonna be there, be ready for us." They walk in the gates and at first they're looking and they're asking themselves, "Is this Naomi?" And now there is a sense of joy and shouting, "Naomi is home! Is this Naomi that has been gone?" And so this joyful reception. Now, again, remember if you're reading this not knowing what happens next, think about what we're seeing. She's not alone. She is home. She is back at the House of Bread. She's in the Promise land. The people are excited to see her.

And now listen to her words. When they say, "'Is this Naomi?' She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?'" Wow. "Is this the

Naomi that we knew to be a follower of Yahweh? A joyful woman who loved God?" I mean, she basically and we can understand if we put ourselves in her place, but what she's dealing with, she's angry with God because she's not seeing her circumstances rightly.

But in fairness to her, she hears her name, Naomi, and remember I mentioned before Bethlehem meant House of Bread, the names themselves had meaning. It wasn't just a name like our names, a title, a tag, it was a word and Naomi meant "pleasant," and so they were saying, "Is this Pleasant One who has come back home? Pleasant, it's good to see you." And so she says, "Do not call me Pleasant, call me Bitter," that's what Mara means. "Don't call me Pleasant, call me bitter." She realizes that, in a sense, her name mocks her. Her name, she feels at this moment in her life, that her name is truly making fun of her. I mean, the name in Hebrew culture and in ancient mideastern culture, the name was related to the character of the person. It was also related to the calling or destiny of the individual and so you give a name as a sense of calling and destiny. Her name is Pleasant and so she believes she's called to pleasantness and look what she's found, bitterness.

Her name mocks her and as she looks at her circumstances, she looks at her name, she sees a complete disconnect because she doesn't see very clearly. If she saw a little more clearly and we'll talk about this a little more fully in a little bit, but it's not uncommon for people's names in God's word to mock them, in some sense, as a part of his showing his glory. One of the most profound examples of this is the name Abram. God called a man whose name was Abram to be his follower. We know him as Abraham, right? He changed his name later but the name Abram, Abram lived with for a long time until God changed his name and what the name meant was "exalted father." The problem was Abram had no children so when people would call him, he would hear, "Exalted Father, Exalted Father. I've got no kids. I've got no kids." But the Lord used a circumstance like that to show his glory, didn't he? And so if she was even informed about that, she might be more hopeful of the fact. "My name may be mocking me now but look what God does in situations like that."

A sense of calling and destiny. Now, we can feel that way. Necessarily our names, we don't feel like our names are inconsistent because we don't have that meaning but we can feel like we have a sense of destiny or a sense of direction that we've received from God and that we are not getting and we can feel like, in that sense, our lives are mocking us. You're not where you planned to be at the age you are now. Perhaps you felt God had called you to some other vocation and you dreamed of that and it never worked out. Perhaps you wanted to be a missionary and you couldn't go to the mission field because of some other circumstances beyond your control, yet you were certain God wanted you to go. Perhaps your career path has not gone the way that you expected. You've been passed over on promotions and people with as best you can tell, even trying to be as objective as you can, you're certain that they chose some people that are lesser qualified over you and you look at that and you're tempted to be angry with God. You're tempted to feel that your life is mocking you. As a mother or a father, you thought that your life would be different, your married life would be different than it is today. You thought that

your kids would be at different places than they are. You felt like God had given you promises and you tried your best to fulfill your obligations and to pray and to minister the word and yet you have a child that's not walking with God and you wonder and secretly in your heart you struggle with real fundamental anger at the Lord.

This is where Naomi was. This is where we can truly find ourselves because life does not go the way we plan it. Life doesn't go the way we expect. Isn't it so rare that anything happens the way you expect, really? We plan something out and when it really happens the way we plan it, isn't that just...we ought to just celebrate, circle that place on the calendar, never forget this happened. A taste of heaven. But in a fallen world, that's a very rare thing.

Now, she not only is upset about her name which she emphasizes by the command, "Do not call me Naomi," in verse 20 and then the question in verse 21, "Why do you call me Naomi?" she also in her words about God says some very profound things. She uses two names for God and the names are arranged, interestingly in the providence of God, in a chiasmic structure, that is, she uses the name Almighty, then she talks about the Lord, then she talks about the Lord, and then she talks about the Almighty. In verse 20, "the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." That's your A of the chiasm. "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." That's B. "Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Do you see how that chiasmic structure works? What that does is it gives you sort of two separate tracks but it really emphasizes the inner track. That's what a chiasm does, it draws your attention to the middle.

But first the outside. She says, "the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." There are four verbs that she uses: two for Almighty and two for the LORD, Yahweh. What has the Almighty done? He "has dealt very bitterly with me and he has afflicted me." Very bitterly with me, dealt very bitterly in verse 20, and afflicted me in verse 21. That God has, the Almighty, the name itself, Shaddai, he is the one who can do anything he wants to do. There is nothing too hard for him. This is the name Shaddai. So she says, "Shaddai has dealt very bitterly with me. Shaddai has afflicted me." It's a name which it does accurately reflect the person of God, the character of God, the power of God, yes, but it's one that's often used in the Old Testament, when you find the words "the Almighty," it's interesting to note that you find "God Almighty" a number of times in more positive...and this is found sometimes in positive context too but it's striking how many negative contexts the phrase "the Almighty" comes up in. In the Old Testament, 50 times in the Old Testament you will find the phrase "the Almighty," 30 of them are in one book, the book of Job where Job feels helpless before the will, the capricious will of the Almighty and I think there's something of that here. Naomi knows that he is sovereign, knows that he's in charge but she feels completely helpless before his omnipotent uncaring hand.

Dealt bitterly and afflicted me. The word "afflicted" actually is from the root which means "evil." He has done evil to me. Not that he has committed evil. The Old Testament word for "evil" and the New Testament word too, actually, has the idea of harm, injury, so it's not moral evil strictly speaking the way we think of it, it's the idea of injury. So



she's saying, "The Almighty has made my life bitter and the Almighty has injured me. He has hurt me." That's the outside of her chiasm that she talks about what the Lord has done.

Then she uses the word "LORD" which is the more personal name for God, Yahweh. His name, his covenant name. And she says, "What has the LORD done? I went out full but the LORD brought me back empty." I went out full, everything was good, but Yahweh got involved in my life and he brought me back empty.

Then she says, "Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" This word "witnessed against me" has a legal forensic flavor to it, a tone to it, and it means she's picturing kind of herself as a defendant in a case and the Lord testifies against her and she's convicted and charged and she feels helpless before all of that. In fact, the way that the wording even of that inner couplet, she pictures the word order itself in the Hebrew, it doesn't come out in the English very well, but Naomi and Yahweh are the first and last words of that phrase, "since the LORD has witnessed against me," and so what she's trying to do is paint herself as the enemy of Yahweh. She sees the LORD as her adversary. Now, she's not really declaring war on him, she knows that he's God and she in her heart is resigned and submitted to him, but she's saying, "I feel like I'm his enemy."

Do you ever feel like that God is against you? That your life is filled with bitterness? There will be times where you're going to feel like that if you haven't yet. When you look at your circumstances and you don't inform them correctly with Scripture, that's the inevitable conclusion that you may draw either for yourself or even looking at someone else's life. So what does it look like? It looks like when your circumstances are mocking you and you're questioning the very character of God, that's what anger with God looks like.

Now, thirdly, the last point. We looked at where does it come from, what does it look like, thirdly: how do you deal with it? How do you deal with this? If it's a problem with spiritual vision, we need to address that. We need to work on our vision. If you're a believer, there are four things that I think we should do in this last point, how do you deal with it, and essentially you could summarize all four points with one statement. There are going to be four points but the one statement is: apply your theology to your life. Apply your theology to your life. That's how you overcome anger with God. You take the theology and you move it from theoretical theology to practical theology and you say that what's true in God's word is true in my life and my perception may argue against it but that shouldn't be surprising because I have a vision problem. God's word is perfect.

So essentially apply your theology to your life by doing four things. The first is: look at your circumstances carefully through the lens of God's word. Look at your circumstances carefully through the lens of God's word. John Calvin had a great image he used. He said that we tend, because of the darkening of the mind even as believers, we tend to look at our world around us and interpret it improperly. We look at natural revelation, the things in the world, science, we look at it and he says we will...our eyes are off. Our spiritual

eyes are off. What we need to do to understand the world around us is, first of all, put on the lenses of holy Scripture, the spectacles. He said what it's like for us is we live with farsightedness or eye problems and we're looking at the world, we can't see what God wants us to see. Just like me with these glasses off right now, I cannot read a word on the page of my Bible. I can read one word: Ruth right here. But the rest of it I can't read and I could sit here and look at my...and this is what happens, when we look at our life, our circumstances, we look at how bad things are and we study it, we think about it, it's foolish to think about it without your spectacles on. It will only lead to frustration and anger with God. If you look at your life circumstances and you don't have your spectacles on, you can't make sense out of them. It is a hopeless endeavor. It will lead to fruitlessness and frustration and it will lead to your heart becoming more and more embittered.

So what do you do? The first thing you do is you put your spectacles on and what does that mean? It means you take the word of God and you think about what the word of God says to be true for all people in all times, in all places, and you apply that to me at this moment. This is true of me. And what happens is when you put the word of God on and you begin thinking about the word, you're loving the Lord, you're looking at God, "Help me. Help me understand." And you're in his word and you're thinking about, "Even though my circumstances say this," and you see the Psalmist doing this kind of thing. "My circumstances say that the Lord doesn't care about me but I know," and they start rehearsing. "Look what God did in the exodus. Look how God kept his people and how he provided for them." What are they doing? They're putting on the spectacles so that they can interpret their present circumstances and that's why the Psalmist will often start out complaining against God, almost railing against God, almost, and then at the end, he will be praising God because that's the benefit of putting your spectacles on.

So that's what we're to do and when you do that, it's amazing how your eyesight improves. Like, for instance, she would begin to see, "Hey, I'm not alone because God is with me. He has promised he's never going to leave us. In circumstances like this, I'm not alone even if I feel like I'm alone because the Lord will not leave me alone." Paul when he says, remember when Paul talks about how all the people had abandoned him? They turned against him? "But the Lord stood by me." He remembered the promises and he applied them to the moment and God strengthened his heart.

So Naomi could have known that as well and if she had started with that, do you know what she would have known right after that? "The Lord is with me and look at this woman right here with me too. Look at his hand loving me. What an amazing thing that a Moabitess has come back with me." You get yourself out of your pain and you look at God and suddenly things become clearer. What in the world has happened? And that's actually one of the ironic things going on in this passage. It drips with this wonderful irony.

Look at verse 22, "So Naomi returned." Remember the word "returned" is the word "shuwb"? It's also translated often in the Old Testament as "repent," and it occurs 12 times in the first chapter. It's one of the main words in the chapter. She returned from

Moab, she's returned to Canaan, to Bethlehem, "and with her Ruth," but not Ruth, what? Who? "Ruth the Moabitess." What? Ruth the Moabitess. The people from Moab are the least likely to be saved in the minds of the Jews. They can't even come into the temple according to Deuteronomy 23. Remember, they're the children of Lot and his daughter and they were the ones who did such wickedness to Israel as they were preparing to enter the Promise Land, getting Balaam to curse God's people and engaging God's people in adulterous relationships so that they could confound and curse God's people. It's an amazing thing that's happening here.

So you look at your circumstances through God's word, through the lens of God's word, and you begin to see it differently, and what that helps you to do is the last three points we're going to hit quickly. Applying your theology to your life, the first thing you need to do or it's the second sub point, B: not only look at your circumstances through the lens of God's word, gladly submit to God's sovereignty. Gladly submit to God's sovereignty. Stop kicking against the goads. Daniel 4:35, "Who can resist His will or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" Jeremiah 18:3-6, Jeremiah goes down to the potter's house. He's making something on the wheel. The Lord tells him, "Go down to the potter's house, I want you to observe something." He goes down to the potter's house and he sees the potter making something on the wheel. Verse 4, this is chapter 18 of Jeremiah, "But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?' " Now, whether you like it or not and in our sinfulness we don't and that's our bad, whether you like it or not, every single person that has ever been created is clay in the hand of God. You can kick against it, but you can't change it. You can pretend it's not true, but you cannot alter it.

He is Lord of heaven and earth and this is the other thing, it's right for him to be so. Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof." Psalm 100, "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." You didn't make yourself, you don't have any authority over yourself. As a Christian, we know that the God who holds us, who is sovereign over everything, is also good. We're going to talk about that in a moment. And we should gladly submit to his sovereignty.

So Naomi says, "Why has my husband died? Why have my two sons died? I think God is against me." Wait a minute, she's right, she had nothing to do with making her husband die or her sons die, that happened completely outside of her control, but what she must not do is see God as her adversary. She must understand that God has a plan. He has a purpose. He's doing what he wants to do and, listen, when we're going through our lives, like I said earlier, you know, we get frustrated our plans don't work out, the Bible says, "A man plans his way, the Lord directs his steps." So keep planning your way, keep trying to operate your plan but be prepared that the Lord is going to direct your steps and when he does, submit to it. "Wow, the Lord had a different plan. We planned a picnic, he planned for it to rain. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And it wasn't just to confound our picnic plans because that's not who he is."

So submit to his sovereignty, thirdly, not just look at his circumstances through the lens of God's word, secondly, submit to his sovereignty, thirdly: trust in his goodness. His chesed. His lovingkindness. Apply that to your life. Naomi, apply that to your life. If he is good, if he looks at people in affliction and is drawn to them, if he does not treat us as our sins deserve, in other words, if he is a God of chesed, of lovingkindness, then he is that to you. He doesn't change. So realize that even though you don't understand why your husband has died and your two sons have died, you don't understand why your plans have been confounded, your dreams have shattered, you don't understand why but he does and he is good and you can trust him.

And we see it played out in the word over and over. I mentioned Abram's name mocked him, 25 years he had to wait for a son and then before his son was born, even conceived, God changed his name and said, "Now your name is Abraham." "Lord, really? My name meant 'exalted father.' I've just kind of gotten used to 24 years, I've learned to live with that now. I've just gotten over that, took that off my prayer list. I'm doing okay with that now and now you're changing my name to Abraham which means 'father of a multitude'? Really, Lord?" But what did God do? A year after that, less than a year after that, he had a son, Isaac, whose name was "laughter, joy." You see, God is good and how much wonderful, how much more precious was that boy because they waited so long? And how much more glorious and how much more encouragement has come to God's people throughout all time because God waited that long to give him a son?

Joseph, his name didn't mock him but his destiny did. You're going to be the ruler. You're going to be the ruler of your brothers. "Yeah, that's what God has told me. I know it's going to happen. I'm convinced it's going to happen." The next thing he does, he finds himself on the way to enslavement in Egypt and he's down there for 13 years in an Egyptian prison, well, slavery in an Egyptian prison before God lifts him out of that. But God does exactly what he said.

You see, God doesn't do it our way and so if we're going to sit there and try to second guess him with our limited vision, we're going to be angry all the time and that's just plain dumb and it's not what we're called to be. We're called to be joyful followers of God and if we could see what he really sees, we would be joyful. If you could see...isn't it true even in your life now, can't you look back at circumstances and you remember when something happened or it didn't happen, your initial response broken-heartedness, frustration and then later, "Now I see. It was good that I was afflicted," David said, "for now my feet run to your commandments."

So it's learning to trust God, trust in his goodness. Look at your circumstances through his word, submit to his sovereignty, trust in his goodness and then wait for God's timing. Just wait for God's timing. He may not show you the other side of...I mean, we're not going to see the other side really of the tapestry until we get to heaven but sometimes it seems like he gives us almost a glimpse of it. It's like he flips up the corner and you see a little bit of it but you can't determine when that happens. Wait on him to do it. In the end we will see it. I think that's one of the reasons, this is just me speculating a little bit, but you know when it says he wipes away every tear from our eyes, why are you crying in

heaven? Well, we stop crying obviously but maybe we start to cry a little bit because when we see the tapestry, we mourn in our hearts over all the doubts and all the anger and all the frustration. "How could I have doubted you? Everything you've done is perfect and good." And the tears begin to flow and our loving God wipes away the tears.

It is a good thing to be a follower of Yahweh and you do that by knowing Jesus Christ, his Son, who came and experienced the life of pain and suffering so that he could be a faithful high priest, a merciful high priest, and he offered himself at Calvary proving his love, bearing our sins in his body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Why would you not give yourself to him? If you're not a believer here today, why would you not give yourself to him? Repent and believe today. Today is the day of salvation.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we exalt your name. We marvel at your ways. And truly, your ways are not our ways, your thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are your ways and your thoughts above ours and Lord, we are so glad. If you did things our ways and according to our thoughts, there would be no glory, there would really be nothing beautiful about it. Your ways are beautiful. Your ways are good. Father, we pray for those that are here that are struggling with anger with you. They look at their circumstances and see in their own minds, we see in our own minds really good reasons, we think, to be angry with you, to feel that you've failed us. Lord, grant repentance. Grant deep godly sorrow over that because to accuse you of wrongdoing, it is the most wicked thing that we can do. You never do anything wrong. You always do what is best and right and loving and good and you prove that, you proved your love and your goodness through giving Jesus. If you would give him and not spare him, how can we doubt your giving to us anything other than good things? Lord, help us be people who walk in joy, walk in victory, walk in submission and trust, that you might be exalted in our lives no matter what circumstances you bring. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*