

## Darkness As Grace

### Intro

- Good morning Mercy Family
- What an honor it is to be with you again
- Happy mothers day to All the mothers
- For those of you who don't know me my name is Joseph
  - I am married to Kaylon
  - And we have 4 children
  - 4
- Some of yall are **looking like** you don't look **old enough** to have four kids
  - **I'm not** yall be praying for me
- To give some context our oldest is 19 **Nygeria**
- Our next one is 18 **Hermoine**
- And then theres my boy Duece hes 2
- Our youngest is 6 months
- **A couple of weeks** ago all the **ladies** in the house **went out of town**
  - So me and Deuce had the **first ever daddy ducey staycation**
  - It was awesome
  - We played at the **park**
  - We ate **pizza** and **ice cream**
  - We splashed around in the **rain**
  - We had a ball
  - **We did all the things** that daddy and deucy do together
- And even tho the **days** were a bit **different**
  - **He dosent get pizza and ice cream on the regular**
  - The **nights** were **exactly the same**

- We would **sit** on the **floor**
- And **cuddle around a book**
- **Now for any of you** with **particular toddlers** like me
  - you know that **regardless of how many book** choices
  - You will be **reading 1 of 4 books** at bed time
  - I mean **where** is the **intrigue** in **brown bear brown bear after the 73<sup>rd</sup> time?**
- But he **sits there** in my lap **night after night**
  - With an **anticipation** and **wonder unmatched** by the night before
  - To him these are the **best stories**
  
- **And Get this**
  - his **familiarity** with the story **does not take away** from his **wonder**
  
- Today we will dive into
  - what for **some** of you is a **familiar story...**
  - But it has **great**
    - **significant**
    - **meaning**
    - **and impact for our lives**
  - Not to mention
    - This really is **among** the **best stories ever told**
  
- This Story **reveals** how
  - **God Orchestrates** everyday events

- o for his eternal purposes
- **Today** we will be in **Ruth 1** which contains
  - o Love
  - o Loss
  - o And Loyalty
  - o The **three L's** of any great **drama**
- **And here's my ask**
  - o I ask that **we would gather** around and **hear a story**
  - o A story
  - o That I Pray would have a profound impact on
    - our hope
    - our perspective...
    - I pray that it will bring grace
    - And ultimately give us a
      - Greater appreciation of the Providence of God
- If y'all are good with that I would love to **Pray and dive in**

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup>The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup>But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup>and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

- There is a **kind of weightiness** to this intro
  - o The author is **unapologetically constructing** a **dark and ominous backdrop**
- The **Period** is the **Time of the Judges**

- And in the **book of the Judges**
  - the **consistent refrain** was...
    - **there was no King in Israel and the people did what was right in their own eyes**
  - The **time of the judges** was a time where **Israel indulged** in
    - sin
    - Idol worship
    - and debauchery ...
  - and book **concludes** with the people of **Israel depicted** in the **same light** as those whom **God judged** in Sodom and Gomorrah
  
- The cycle we see in the book of judges is this
  - The people sin
  - God Judges
  - The people repent
  - God redeems
  - ...wash rinse repeat
  
- And So **as we are introduced** to the **people** of this story
  - **We meet people**
  - who are **living** in the **most sinful** period in **Israel's history**
  
- We meet
  - Elimelech
  - Naomi
  - Mahlon
  - And Chilion
  - This family **lived in Bethlehem**
    - but **migrates to Moab** as a result of the Famine
  - In Moab
    - Ruth and Orpha are **grafted into their story**
    - And with that
    - the **character list** for **Act 1** is complete

- But **Abruptly** by the **end verse 5** the **men are dead**
  - Their **roles** were shorter than a **black man in a scary movie**
  - introduced and escorted out
  - almost Simultaneously
- And with all the **men Absent** what
  - we have **remaining** are **three depressed widows**
- **Naomi The main Character** stands in **utter darkness**
  - she's lost her husband
  - her children
- She has been **widowed** meaning
  - she has **lost all status**
  - all **security**
- She is... the **equivalent of homeless**
  - And she is **hopeless**
- We can only imagine how
  - The **pain of her loss** would have **invaded the deepest regions of her soul**
  - Her agony ...
    - excruciating
  - Her Suffering
    - constant
- **and yet** the **narrator** will **fight** throughout the story
  - to **cause Naomi and us to believe**
  - that **God does not waste suffering**
- The book of **Ruth** calls us
  - to have a **greater appreciation for the Providence of God**
- In the midst of **social chaos**
  - violence
  - idolatry
  - and moral depravity

- and **personal chaos**
  - With funeral after funeral after funeral
- we are called to somehow trust that God is working all things together for good ...
- the **question** that the author of **Ruth presses** before us
  - **is what is God doing in the darkness**
  - and the **answer** that the book of Ruth **reveals**
    - is that **God uses darkness for Grace**
- In this Text today we will **see God uses darkness**
  - for discipline
  - for discovery
  - and for preparation
    - And so with that as our **foundation** we **dive into** the story
- We start with Darkness as discipline

### **Darkness as discipline**

<sup>6</sup>Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.

- **Pause**
- The narrator has **spent the 1st 5** verses of this text
  - **assembling the darkest backdrop** possible
- he wants us to know that **darkness is a reality of life**
  - but even in the **midst of darkness**
  - **God's grace remains**
- **The lack of provision** that caused her family to **abandon the land of Promise**
  - has been **done away with** by **the presence of God**

- God has visited his people...
  
- grace abounds in every word of this little verse
  - First off God went Back to this sinful people
  
- And then... He was a real one and let Naomi know about it
  
- The fact that Naomi hears the news of God's Visitation is grace
  - she didn't pull this up on social media
  - she didn't hear about it on her local news outlet
  
- but God insured that the news traveled
  - to the fields of Moab...
    - over mountains
    - and across seas
  - God insured that Naomi heard the good news
    - that God had once again visited his people
  
- Oh how this news must have been like WATER to the thirsty and desperate soul of Naomi
  - even in her darkness
  - God was pursuing her
  
- We continue

<sup>7</sup> So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup> The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>10</sup> And they said to her,

“No, we will return with you to your people.” <sup>11</sup> But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? <sup>12</sup> Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, <sup>13</sup> would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.” <sup>14</sup> Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

- Verses 7 through 14 tell a complex story
- As we pick up in verse 7 **everything is going according to plan**
  - Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah are all **on their way back to Judah**
- but at **some point** on the journey from **Moab to Bethlehem**
  - **Naomi decides**
  - it will be best for the **girls not to come**
- She says in verse 8
  - **Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup>The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!”**
- Naomi's **complex theology** is on **full display**
- Here we're going to see **what Naomi believes about God**
  - **about rest**
  - **about hope**
- For starters **Naomi believes God is God**
  - she desires that **Yahweh** is the one **who deals kindly** with Ruth and Orpah
- There are **two words** of **immense significance** here
  - The **first** is the capital **L.O.R.D** in v 8



- o When we **see** that in the Bible it means **Yahweh**
- o God's **Covenant** Name
- o Its the **name** that **people who know him** call Him
- She **doesn't** just **desire** that things **go well** with them
  - o That **fate** deals them a kind hand
  - o or that the **God of Moab** would be merciful
  - o No her **theology compels** her to ask for the kindness of Yahweh
- And that brings us to the **second word ... Kindness**
  - o the word **kindness** here
  - o is the Hebrew word **hesed**
  - o most often **translated steadfast love**
- It represents **God's**
  - o **loyalty,**
  - o **faithfulness,**
  - o **grace,**
  - o **mercy,**
  - o **compassion.**
- It pretty much **sums up the positive attributes** of God
- and so **don't miss** what **Naomi is asking**
  - o In her prayer... she invokes the **covenant God**
  - o To direct his **covenant love**
  - o toward **moabite women**
  - o **in Moab**
- This **prayer is Audacious**
  - o and it **reveals** that
  - o She **believes God is Powerful**
  - o **And kind ... at least to others**
- but as we continue to **untangle Naomi's complex view of God**
  - o we will see
    - is that though she **understands**
    - his **power**
    - she **has missed his LOVING** charter

- It all starts to unravel in **verse 9**
  - **The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!"**
  - And here we **begin** to see **what Naomi believes** about **rest**
  - **According to Naomi rest** comes from **Yahweh plus husband**
- The **temptation** to believe that **rest comes from God plus anything**
  - is a lie
- **Do not be deceived** into **believing** that
  - **God doesn't know**
  - **or doesn't care**
- The Author is saying
  - **You will find rest in Yahweh alone**
  - **or in not at all**
  - **No one or thing will give you rest but God**
- Ruth and Orpah **stare in the face the biggest decision** of their **life**
  - To **seek first** a husband
  - Or **Yahweh**
- and **Initially** they **respond**
  - We **won't leave** you Naomi
  - we will **accompany** you to the **land of your God**
- And Naomi's **response** is all too **telling** ... She says
  - **Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me?**
- And **we see not only** what Naomi believes about **rest**
  - But what she **believes about hope**
- **Yahweh has returned and visited his people**
  - And **she ask why** would you come
- And **before** we **condemn her**
  - let's **consider her heart**

- for **women in this period**
  - your **job options** were
    - wife
    - mother
    - or slave
- their **choices** were **unemployment and homelessness**
  - or **Moab**
- So shes like
  - go find **rest in a good man**
  - go find **provision in a good home**
  - go find **honor in raising good kids**
- the **issue** is **she was calling her daughters to go find** these things
  - at the **expense of returning to Yahweh**
- the **issue** with Naomi **calling** Ruth and Orpah to **return home**
  - is the reality that **Yahweh has visited his people**
- So **let me ask** you parents
  - **mothers** on Mother's Day
  - is your **hope** for your children **in Yahweh**
  - Or are you **calling them to rest** in
  - Their **ability to find a spouse**
  - is their **relationship with God** more important than
    - their GPA
  - Do you desire your children to find **honor** in the **absence of bad behavior**
    - Or are you **longing** for something more **substantive**
    - **like a lasting relationship with the God who changes them from the inside out ...**
- Are your **prayers** for your children **consumed** by your desire for their
  - **Happiness**

- **Or success**
  - Or is your **greatest desire** that they **know their creator**?
- **No we cannot condemn Naomi**
  - instead let's **reflect** on her **reasoning**
  - and **choose better** for our children
- Naomi is in a **broken** place
- Hear the **desperate** nature of her **heart** as she shares an **intimate moment** with her daughters
  - **Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me?**
  - <sup>12</sup>**Turn back, my daughters; go your way,**
- Our **hearts** should **break** for Naomi
  - She is **without hope** and ...**full of despair**
  - her **world** has **collapsed**
  - **every one of us would be a wreck if we were here**
  - This is **The Dark Knight** of the soul...
  - and Naomi blames God
- She says
  - **No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."**
- Naomi saw the **famine**
  - As **evidence** of **God's hand** against her
- As far as she was concerned it was **God who had driven them TO Moab**
  - **And in Moab her husband died**
  - **And her sons to**
- In her mind... the **mighty hand of God**
  - that **flooded the earth**
  - **struck Egypt with plagues**
  - and **destroyed an entire generation of Israelites** in the **desert**

- was now **aimed at her**
- And Her **assessment** of God's **opposition** toward her
  - is **not** for **dramatic effect**
  - she really **believed** that **God was against her**
- We **know** this **because** of v 19
  - If we **fast forward** in the story
  - we see that **Orpah returns home** but **Ruth continues** with **Naomi**
- V19

<sup>19</sup> So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" <sup>20</sup> She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi;<sup>[a]</sup> call me Mara,<sup>[b]</sup> for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

- In this scene
  - **Naomi returns** to **Bethlehem**
  - it's been at least **10 years** probably longer
  - and **life** has dealt **SO harshly** with her
  - that the woman of the town **don't even recognize** her
- **is this Naomi** they whisper
- And naomi's **response** shows the **depth of her pain**
- her **assertion** about **God's hand** >
  - was not just a **ploy** to get her **Daughters** to **return to Moab...**
  - **it was her firmly held conviction**
- **"Don't call me Naomi** "she says
  - call me ... **Mara**
  - ...which means **bitter**

- She was not saying **call me bitter ...adjective**
  - she was saying **call me bitter... noun**
  - in other words **bitterness** was **no longer** her **experience**
  - it was her **identity**
  
- **So what led her here**
  
- Well Naomi
  - had **obeyed**
  - **trusted**
  - and **loved**
    - something **more** than **Yahweh**
  
- Naomi was an **Idolater**
  - and so are **you and i**
  - Naomi's experience is a **warning**
    - **aimed** directly at our **Idol loving hearts**
  
- we read **last week**
  - The sorrows of those who take another god for themselves will multiply;
  
- We **see clearly** the evidence of **multiplied sorrows** here
  - She has changed her **name to bitter!!!**
  
- And unfortunately
  - there is **evidence** that she has **taken for herself another God**
  - **Last week** we said you can **identify** an Idol by asking
    - what do we **Obey**
    - What do we **trust**
    - and what do we **love**
  
- whom did she **obey**
  - when her **husband** Elimelech
  - **Suggested** that they **leave** the land of promise
  - likely **knowing** that **God** would **have them stay**
  - she **followed**
  
- Husband one God Zero

- **who** did she **trust**
  - What was her **refuge**
  - where was her **hope**
  
- well... we have seen her say **word for word V12**
  - if I should **hope** COMMA
  - if I should have a **husband**
  - **for Naomi**
    - **hope**
    - **refuge**
    - **and trust**
  - were found in **husband**
  - that's why she **tells** her **girls to go**
- husband 2 God Zero
  
- And who did she **Love?**
- Well let's take a look at vs 21
  - **I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.**
  - So for Naomi **full** equals
    - husband and children
    - Without Yahweh
  - and **empty**
    - is **Yahweh**
    - but no husband or children
  
- Last week **David** said
  - **I have nothing good apart from you**
- This week Naomi says
  - I **have you** and **still i have nothing good**
  
- We **see** what Naomi **Loves** ¥
  
- But Here's the **MORE pressing question** for the day
  - **who or what do you love**
  - What is that thing that **if you have your full**
  - and if you **lose** you're **empty**
  
- It's the **MOST important question** you will ever answer
  - **What makes you full**

- **Is it Jesus???**
- Have you **Tasted and seen** the **fullness** of God
  - Has **your soul know** his **love**
- I love the way **modern philosopher Alicia** keys says it
  - that everything is nothing
  - if i ain't got you
  - Is he that to you
- If Not
- Would you consider with me for a moment that maybe (**slow**)
  - just maybe
  - some of our suffering
  - are just the multiplied sorrows
  - of taking up another God
- Do you want to **know why** our **misplaced hope** leaves us **hopeless?**
  - its because **God loves us**
  - If **God didn't love us**
  - he wouldn't **strip** from us
  - those things that **keep us from hoping** in him
- You know what would have been **God's wrath** on Naomi
  - allowing her to **live out her days "full"** in Moab
  - **a full temporary life far from Yahweh**
- **What is he doing in our darkness**
- **Sometimes... our darkness is discipline**
  - Helping to make Jesus our full



- And I can see some of y'all thinking right now
  - **well what about me**
  - I have said yes to Jesus
  - and I still sit in darkness
  
- I need to acknowledge those of you who **intimately know this darkness**
  
- We genuinely **question** the **character of God ...**
  - in those **moments of losing a spouse or child**
  - We question **is God good**
  
- When our **battle with depression** has lasted for years
  - We **question Does God care**
  
- When we're **layed off ...or our marriage is failing apart**
  - we wonder **does God love us?**
  - **is he displeased ?**
  - **is he angry?**
  
- Hear me... God loves you
- God Loves you
- ...He loves you
  - Despite Darkness
  
- And **if you're full of Jesus** and **surrounded by darkness**
  - don't worry
  - the book of **Ruth is still for you**
  - as a matter of fact **the character of Ruth is for you**
  
- **Even in her faithfulness Ruth experienced deep Darkness**
  
- Ruth is a **wonderful example** to us

- o Of how the **grace of God in Darkness**
- o empowers our **ability to discover Him**
  - as the **better portion**
  - and a **better hope**
- So if we could... let's **rewind** the tape back to **verse 14**
  - o and see how **Ruth but not Orpah**
  - o End up in **Bethlehem**

## **Darkness as Discovery**

**<sup>14</sup>Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.**

- to this point in the story Ruth and Orpah have **been equals**
  - o Up until now there has been **no distinction**
  - o they were the **wives of Mahlon and Chilion**
  - o They were the **daughter in-laws of Naomi**
  - o but now
    - Orpah kisses and **leaves**
    - while Ruth **clings**
- Orpah
  - o **concludes** that the **safer**
  - o and **more secure** route is back in **Moab**
- She was... **compelled** by the **words of Naomi**
  - o And in her **final assessment**
  - o she agrees that finding a **husband really is the better option**
- Her decision makes **sense** on **every practical level**
  - o She could **live with her parents** until she **found a husband**
  - o and once she **found a husband** maybe she'd **have kids**
- So Orpah **kisses Naomi goodbye**
  - o And **departs from the pages of scripture**
- And Oprah's **example teaches us**
  - o The **safest option isn't always best**

- Orpah's "Good decision" functions only as a **contrast** to those **who risk everything to follow Jesus**
- And then there's Ruth
  - V15 is her first time being **highlighted as an individual**
  - but is it **worth the wait**
  - her words are **among the most memorable** in all of **scripture**
    - And she utters them with **grace**
    - **precision**
    - **and poise**
- Naomi says

<sup>15</sup> **And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."**

- Naomi is no evangelist
  - she is making every attempt to **chase Ruth back**
  - to **her own gods**
  - and **own people**
- Look
  - **Orpah gets it**
  - Don't you wanna **be happy**
  - don't you want to **have a husband**
  - don't you wanna **have a home**

- Ruth says

<sup>16</sup> **But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD... ( There it is again) do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."**

- It's **one of those moments..**
  - where one person is **trying to convince** the other person of something

- o we can imagine **Naomi mid sentence**
- and Ruth just being like
  - o **stop**
  - o I'm not
  - o I'm not **going anywhere**
- where you **go I go**
  - o where you **sleep**
  - o I **sleep**
  - o I am **forsaking my people**
  - o **and my God**
  - o I'm going to **die where you die (Slow)**
- I have made my decision
  - o there's **nothing** you can **say** to **change my mind**
- don't miss the **magnitude** of **ruth's commitment (slow)**
  - o Naomi probably has Ruth by at least **20 years**
  - o and yet she says **after you die**
  - o I'm still **not going back** to Moab
  - o I'm **staying**
  - o **Bury me amongst your people**
- The **commitment** that Ruth makes too Naomi
  - o Is **greater than marriage**
  - o She said
    - Ride or die ...girl please
    - **Ima ride and die**
- Ruth is **staring down the barrel**
  - o of homelessness
  - o hunger
  - o and hard labor
  - o And she **doesn't flinch**
  - o she **doesn't retreat**
- she says
  - o No no no no no
  - o I chose
  - o Your people

- o your God
- And this is amazing
  - o Because...**what on earth** does **Ruth know about Naomi's God**
  - o **other than**
  - o he seems to be **content** to **allow his subjects to suffer**
  - o What has she seen other than his **sovereign hand at work**
    - To her detriment
- We're left to ask ....**Who is this woman**
  - o and what on earth **has motivated her**
    - To **leave everything** to follow Naomi ...
  - o to **follow Yahweh**
  - o **The Bible loves it when we ask questions**
- Ruth's **primary motivation** is **not her love for Naomi**
  - o The appeal for **human love** is much stronger **back in Moab**
  - o in Moab she could **have husband**
  - o and **children**
  - o and her **real parents**
- Ruth loves Naomi...^ but it is **not her primary motivation**
  - o her **primary commitment** was to Yahweh
- **How can we know this?**
  - o There are **numerous** ways we can know this
  - o But for the sake of time let's examine
    - the language

- Lets examine the Language
  - For starters she uses the **covenant name** of the **God**
  - she says
    - **May (LORD)Yahweh do so to me and more if anything but death parts me from you**
  - She has **submitted** herself to the **God of Israel**
  
- The words... The language she uses matters
  - And as we **dig into her language**
  - we find, **what is to me,**
  - the **most compelling piece of evidence** we have >
  - that **ruth's commitment** was not primarily to Naomi
  - but to **God**
  
- It's right here at the **end of verse 16**
  - Ruth says
    - **your people SHALL be my people and your God my God**
  - now I want you to **ponder this** with me
  - what happens if the **shall** in verse 16 is **past tense**
    - how does it change the sentence
  
- because the **shall** in verse 16 IS past tense
  - and it has **huge implications** for what **she** is saying
  - **shall** right there in verse 16
  - put your **finger** on it
  
- because the shall in verse 16 **is past tense**
  - Ruth is **not** saying your people **will from** here on out be my people
  - she is **not** saying your God **from this point on** will be my God
  
- she is saying to Naomi
  - Do you not understand
  - your people **have already** become my people
  - I'm coming with you
  - because I **love** Yahweh
  - He's **been** my God
  - And I **can't imagine** my life **without** him

- **stop** urging me to go back
  - **This ain't about you**
  - **it's about him**
  
- And now it all begins to make sense
  - **nowhere** in scripture does the Bible teach us to **just be a good person**
  - Ruth is **not** just a **really nice person**
    - seeking to do a **really nice thing** for a widow
  
- Ruth's **languae** is **informing** us that her
  - Returning
  - her going and lodging
  - her death and burial
  - her entire oath
  - is grounded in your people are my people
  - and your God is my God
    - they are **grounded in faith**
    - and **Love** for Yahweh
  
- Consider Hebrews 11
  - By faith **Abel** offered a **more acceptable sacrifice** to God
  - By faith **Noah** took God at his **word** and **built an ark**
  - By Faith **Moses declined** all the **treasures of Egypt** and **suffered** with the **people of God...**
  - And by faith Ruth did the same( **Slow**)
  
- For the sake of **husband**
  - Orpah **returns** to Moab
  
- But not Ruth
  - no Ruth chose **the better portion**
  
- In the **darkness** God had **proven** to Ruth
  - that he was **far better**
  - then **all the provision**
  - **protection**

- o and **Security** the world could muster!!!
- **By God's grace** her suffering had taught her to lean heavily on God
- She **Discover** Him
  - o to be **SO faithful**
  - o that the **prospect of returning** to a foreign land
  - o To **beg** for food
  - o with **no husband**
  - o sounded like a **extraordinary plan**
  - o because she knew **Yahweh would be there**
- **God had visited his people**
  - o And for Ruth the **Visitation of Yahweh** in Israel
  - o was all the **motivation** she needed
- God was gracious to Ruth
  - o Ruth's dark night
    - childlessness
    - widowhood
  - o had led her to a place where she **deeply appreciated** his light
- She had learned that even in **God's hard Providence**
  - o His **intentions** was **gentle and kind**
- It was almost as if she knew **instinctively**
  - o that God was **doing something** with her suffering
- And that **something... culminates** in verse 22
  - o **weather** your darkness is **discipline**
  - o or your darkness is to **discover**
  - o **all darkness** is **Grace** as God **prepares** us to be with him

## **Darkness as Preparation**



<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- As we draw near to the **end of the first act**
  - There is a **hint** of change in the air
- The **Famine** has **ended**
  - And they literally walked up right as **Barley season began**
- The narrator leaves us on the **steepest of cliffhangers**
  - and we are **bombarded with questions** like
    - will **Naomi** remain **empty and bitter**
    - will their **needs** be taken care of
    - how will **Ruth** fare in this **new land**
    - **will she remain faithful to Yahweh**
- And we **return** to where we started...
  - **what is God doing** in Darkness
  - Is he **negligent nor distant...**
  - NEVER (*low*)
- 2 Cor 4 says
  - **this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory,**
- So don't miss this
  - suffering **is preparation for glory**
- So **what was God doing**
  - when he allowed both Ruth and Naomi to become **widowed**
- what was he **doing** during the **ten years** where **Ruth** was **barren**
- What was he **doing in these women** as they **packed up** all they owned
  - and made the **hard journey** from Moab to Bethlehem

- o In all their **stresses of moving**
  - o and in all their **concerns for their protection**
- **Has it been hard for you**
  - o has it been ... dark
  - o are you losing hope
- **what is he doing ?**
  - o according to **scripture** he is **preparing** for us and **eternal weight of glory**
  - o and to finish Paul's statement
  - o **this glory will be beyond all comparison**
- Once Naomi and Ruth **saw** what God was doing
  - o they would **gladly embrace** the path of **suffering**>
  - o That **concluded** in **eternal glory** in an **eternal God**
- So **how** does he do this in the **lives of Ruth and Naomi**
  - o as you **continue** to read this book the **answer becomes**
  - o clear
  - o and wonderful
  - o and magnificent
- without **giving away** too much of the story
  - o Ruth it's gonna meet a **guy**
  - o And... they're going to **get married**
  - o and they're going to have a **son named Obed**
  - o and we'll have a **son named Jesse**
  - o and Jesse will have a **son named David**
  - o and from the line of David will come the **Messiah ...**
  - o **Jesus**
- in the **darkness of the first chapter**
  - o God was **preparing** Ruth and Naomi
  - o to be crafted into the **storyline of Jesus**
- Naomi had **concluded**
  - o **God was against her**
  - o her **hardship** was a result of his **disapproval**
  - o her **pain** was a result of his **punishment**

- oh but in time she would come to find
  - That her **darkness**
  - was just **preparation ...**
  - for her to meet the **God she thought she knew**
  
- Where she once saw **neglect**
  - She would now see a **savior's pursuit**
  - **longing** for her to know **him as he is**
  
- Where she once saw **Distance** and **displeasure**
  - She would see The **sovereign God** **drawing her close**
  
- where she once to saw **lofty indifference**
  - She would see the **intentionality** of a **Loving father**
  
- What the book of Ruth teaches us is that **suffering is necessary** for our **growth and understanding** of God
  
- We cannot understand the **scriptures** nor the **God** who **breathed** them **without suffering**
  - We can't understand the **cross**
  - **Repentance**
  - **without suffering**
  - We will not **long for God** without **suffering**
  
- so then the question becomes **not why** do we suffer
  - **but how**
  
- I would like to give us **3 tools to suffer well** as we close

### Handle Bars

- the first **look for the light in the dark**
  - Naomi did not have the **luxury** of **Our perspective**
  - She did not have the **privilege** of **turning the page**
  
- **If She Did**
  - She would not have **concluded** that God was **against her**
  - if she could only see a **few moments** into her **future**
  
- In her **Darkness**
  - she completely **Ignored**

- o The **rays of light** and grace God was shining in on her **darkness**
  - o Did he not **call her back**
  - o Did he not **end the drought**
  - o Did he not **gift Her Ruth**
  - o And her **pain** had caused her to **miss** all of it
- How can you see **Jesus walking toward you** in the midst of your **storm**
    - o Trust his character
    - o Cling to his goodness
    - o And **look for his Grace**

- Tool number 2

- **Wait on God**

- In **extend seasons of darkness** we are **tempted** to do away with God
  - o and **take up our future** into our own hands

- We can do it
  - o But what we will **find** is that our **strength wanes**
  - o We will **stumble and fall**
  - o Our **running** will make you **weary**
  - o And **IN our walking** we **will faint**

- But hear this **promise from God**
  - o **“but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”...**
  - o How do we **ENDURE** hard seasons
  - o **Wait on God** (**slow**)

- And here's the last tool

- **hope in the greater plan of God**

- o In the lives of Naomi and Ruth **God use the darkness** to **forever intersect** their story with that of **JESUS**
- o I **implore** you to **trust God** in your darkness

- o he has a **proven track record** of working all things together for good
- Fast forward to 33 AD
  - o CREATED in DARKNESS
  - o RETURNS To DARKNESS
  - o REJECTED
- And those who are created by **God**
  - o **devise a plan to publicly humiliate** and **kill** their creator
  - o **It is the unquestioned darkest moment in history**
- MEN Killed GOD
  - o GOD TURNED THAT into GOSPEL
  - o GOSPEL
    - Anyone who hides them self under the shadow of his wing
  - o Shall be saved
- And if **God** can turn the darkest moment in history into that
  - o You can **trust** that **your darkness is Preperation**
    - to meet God
  - o Our **greatest weapon** against **despair** is the **gospel**
    - Hope in it
    - Cling to it
    - Trust in it
  - o Let us pray to that end

