

Ruth 1:6-22 – The Journey Home – Lesson Summary

When I was in college I always enjoyed coming home. I would leave college as early as possible and return as late as possible. My roommate once asked why I enjoyed home so much and I told him that home had always been a place of comfort, familiarity, and rest. I was saddened by his response when he shared that home wasn't like that for him at all. I have fond memories of returning home, while his are unhappy. As we consider Naomi's journey back home to Bethlehem, it appears that she is more apprehensive. Naomi and Ruth's journey home will expose Naomi's conflicted heart, prove Ruth's converted heart, and begin preparing them for the coming harvest of physical and spiritual renewal that the Lord will provide for both women.

The first five verses of the Book of Ruth present one of the greatest tragedies recorded in God's Word. A family's decision to travel to a forbidden land in search of food leads to death, disobedience, and despair. The remaining verses of Chapter 1 begin to tell the story of a return home that will bring about restoration and hope. The Hebrew word for return appears 8 times in the next 16 verses as the author highlights the central theme of this portion of the story. Like many Hebrew words there is a depth of meaning that goes beyond a return to a specific location. This term connotes a change of posture. The same word is used throughout the Old Testament to describe turning back to God's covenant of grace and mercy, to repent, or to convert. What happens in this passage is that their return to a particular location highlights a spiritual turning as well.

At first glance, Naomi's motive appears to be a practical one. She heard that the Lord has returned to His people and granted them food. What led her family to Moab seems to be leading her back home. Along the way we see her conflicted heart as she encourages her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab. Her motives seem practical. She reminds them that Moab offers them the opportunity to remarry. The true God resides with His people in Bethlehem, yet Naomi encourages them to remain in Moab where there is no hope for spiritual renewal. Naomi's heart is conflicted. She acknowledges God's hand in her circumstances but doesn't fully hope in Him for her healing both physically and spiritually. Despite Naomi's best attempts to have the women stay in Moab, Ruth's heart appears to be drastically different as she declares she is not leaving Naomi.

Ruth's declaration of her commitment to Naomi and the Lord is striking in verses 16 and 17. Her words display a heart that has been converted by the Lord. The girl who grew up in a foreign land, worshiping false God's, marrying outside her race, and finding herself widowed by a disobedient Israelite, now identifies with the true God of Israel, the LORD. There can be no explanation other than God divinely opening Ruth's heart. Somewhere along the way, Ruth was exposed to the truth and now identifies with it. This should bring us tremendous hope. God will call and save whomever He desires despite the sin and circumstances of their life. He will do the same for you and I as well. While Naomi wrestles with this reality, Ruth remains steadfast. Her new identity in the Lord motivates her to serve her mother-in-law despite the cost. Naomi's practical reasons for Ruth to stay in Moab are no match for the opportunity to be in the presence of the true God.

Chapter 1 ends with beautiful words of hope as the author specifically addresses that Naomi and Ruth's return was at the beginning of the barley harvest. While this might seem insignificant at this point in the story, it will be an integral part of God's redemptive work in both Naomi and Ruth's lives. We will see that the harvest available to these women far exceeds their physical needs. God will relationally and spiritually restore them through a kinsman redeemer who is the ultimate representation of Christ. Naomi and Ruth leave a foreign land to return to Bethlehem where they will find hope and healing. Many years later, Jesus will leave heaven in order to enter a foreign broken creation through Bethlehem. In doing so, He will secure the same hope and healing for all who would believe in Him.

Discussion:

- 1) Naomi's faith seems to be wavering as a result of the suffering she's experienced. Can you think of a time in which that has happened to you? How have you responded?
- 2) Ruth turns away from the wickedness of Moab and follows the LORD. What things might God be calling you to turn away from?
- 3) The presence of God and His people in Bethlehem will provide healing for Naomi and Ruth. Where do you find hope and healing?