

The Prodigal Daughter

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 July 2022

Preacher: Jon Gemmell

[0 : 00] Well, let's move to our reading for this evening. And it's great to have John Gemmel with us tonight. And John's with us for the next three Sunday evenings. And we're going to be looking at the book of Ruth together. So please turn in your Bibles to Ruth. If you don't have a Bible, and do please, we have some at the back, so do go and grab a Bible. Joanna's got some at the back if you want to grab a Bible. But if you have your own Bible, please do turn to Ruth. And you'll find that in the Old Testament coming after the book of Judges and just before Samuel. So if you find either of those, you're close. Ruth sits just between those two. So Ruth, and we're reading chapter 1 this evening. So Ruth, chapter 1, verse 1.

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. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi. And the names of his two sons were Malon and Chilion.

They were a half, that's a tongue twister. They were Ephathites. I can't say that. Ephathites. John will correct us later. They were people of a path from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died. And she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives. The name of one was Orpha, and the name of the other, Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. 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. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her to her,

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpha kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. 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. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you. And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said, No more. 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?

[4 : 37] Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 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? 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 the barley harvest. Amen. May the Lord bless his word to us this evening.

Good evening. It is so lovely to be with you this evening. I'm so glad you're here and not cheering on the German ladies in the Euro finals. Before we get started, in the wonderful Book of Ruth, why don't we pray together? Father God, we're so thankful that sitting here today, we have your word in our hands. And Father, pray that you would enable that word that is in our hands to be in our minds and in our hearts. Father, please take what is familiar and make it alive in us.

Come before you this evening and acknowledge that our greatest need is to hear you speak your word to each of us. So Lord, speak to us. Your servants are listening.

And we have the audacity to pray this before you, our Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I've got to admit it's getting better. A little better all the time. I have to admit it's getting better,

getting so much better all the time. These are, of course, the words of John, Paul, George, and Ringo in the song It's Getting Better, the fourth song on the famous Sergeant Pepper album. But my question is, is it? Is it getting better? Are we climbing up or are we sliding down? [7 : 01] In a 2019 Ipsos-Mori survey, they asked 26,489 people whether they thought the world was getting better. And only 4% said the world was improving and 95% said it was getting much worse year on year.

All the evidence suggests that we're on a downward spiral despite our best efforts. war in Ukraine, unrest in Sri Lanka, decimated countries dotted across the Middle East and elsewhere, terrorism, both foreign and domestic, pandemics, the cost of living crisis, climate change, racial inequality, confusion about the very fundamentals of what being a human means, rupturing political systems, and on and on and on. And if we're honest, things don't appear to be getting better all the time. But what about not just in the world? What about your life?

Is it increase or is it decline? Is it improvement or deterioration? I turned 40 this year, and for the first time I realized that my prime is behind me. All the recurring aches and pains in my body I can only put down to sleeping funny. That seems to be a recurring theme in my life.

But if we're honest, we have to say our story is shaped more like a tragedy than it is a fairy tale. So if we're on a downward spiral, if the world is in decline, then it's so important that we learn who is able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

[8 : 54] To learn where we can turn for solid hope as it dawns on us that we are all sinking. And against this backdrop, there is no more encouraging place we can turn in our Bibles than the amazing Book of Ruth.

The Book of Ruth is a masterpiece of literary arts. It is up there with the greatest short stories ever told. Listen to the views of one commentator.

Even among the artful narratives of Scripture, Ruth stands out in the power of its concentration, the wholesomeness of its vocabulary, in the versatility of its language, in the balanced proportion of its scenes, in the symmetry of its structure, in the vividness and integrity of its main characters, and in the satisfaction of its ending.

It's right up there with the most beautiful things ever written. I want to show you over our three evenings together that though it is a short story, it is the overture of the biggest story.

It is the overture of God's gracious dealings with people in a fallen world despite their bad choices. A story that intersects and is able, not just a story out there, but a story in here.

[10 : 18] It's a story that's able to transform my little life in 21st century Scotland. It's a story able to transform our corporate lives together and your life individually.

It is well worth our time. It is a story that infuses hope into our hearts, even in a downward spiraling world.

So let's get orientated as we turn to Ruth chapter 1 and verses 1 to 5, where we see the agony of apostasy, the agony of apostasy.

Read with me. Verse 1. In the days when the judges ruled, there was famine in the land. The days when the judges ruled.

That's the book that just ended. And the book of Ruth is going to point us to the book of 1 Samuel. It's going to tell us where David comes from.

[11 : 16] It's kind of like David's generational nativity. In the days when the judges ruled, and the last word is going to be David, which gets us ready for 1 Samuel.

And the days when the judges ruled were an unparalleled period of societal decline for God's people. Do you remember Joshua came into the land?

Triumph. Conquest. We've made it. Our exodus wandering is over. We are here. We are home. We're in the place that God has given us, and God is our God, and we are his people.

But then Joshua dies, and everything goes downhill fast. So Judges gives us the story of these 12 leaders, these 12 small-s saviors, that God raises up to rescue his people from the rank idolatry and the serious problems they've got themselves into.

It's a depressing cycle. 13 times. The people fall into idolatry. They're then given over to a foreign ruler who oppresses them.

[12 : 31] They sink all the way into the bottom, and then right at the bottom they cry out to God, who raises up a judge, who saves them, and the whole cycle goes round again. These 12 leaders stretching from Othniel to Samuel, small-s saviors, but they get worse.

Othniel is the model judge, and Samson is a complete lunatic, and everybody finds their place in the spectrum between. The highs get lower, and the lows get deeper in the book of Judges. And by the time you get to chapters 17 to 21, they should have an 18th certificate, as we read about gang rape, civil war, and lawless anarchy.

The repeated phrase by the end of Judges is this. It's in fact the last words of the book of Judges. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

And Ruth in many ways is going to be the answer to that problem. That if the problem there is no king, then by the end of the book we're going to read the word David, where hope is to be found for God's people.

[13:42] So that is the time frame for Ruth. Ruth happens when everything is crumbling around God's people. They are getting worse, and they're getting worse quickly and repeatedly.

And we read also, not only was it the time of the Judges, but there was famine in the land. It's great irony here. The promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, has dried up.

The taps been turned off. God had warned them that this would happen. That if they trampled his law underfoot, if they forgot him and served other gods, he would bring about curses upon them.

Deuteronomy 28 lists them. If you dishonor the covenant that I've made with you, I will shut up the heavens, and your rain will be turned into powder.

He would cause the people to carry much seed into the field, but they would gather little. Because of locusts, they would plant vineyards, but there would be no grapes because of the curse of worms.

[14:54] They would plant olive trees, but there would be no oil. And so God's people's unfaithfulness in the time of the Judges has brought about the curse of famine that God had promised to bring.

And the reason God brought famine was that it was to provoke God's people to repentance. He would bring them to the end of themselves so they would turn back to him. But they were very slow to get that memo.

And so our narrative of Ruth is against this backdrop of national emergencies. And then we zoom in to one man.

And a man of Bethlehem in Judah. Bethlehem, the house of bread. And what's the problem in Bethlehem? There's no food. Went to sojourn in the country of Moab.

The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife, Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Marlon and Killion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

[16:02] They went into the country of Moab and remained there. Do you see how the end of verse 1 and verse 2 were a repetition? So we learn there's a man who had a family.

He was from Bethlehem and he went to Moab to Sojourn. And then verse 2 fills in the details what his name was, what his wife's name was, what his two sons' name was, what his clan was, what his tribe was.

This is a way of writing in Hebrew that this man is synonymous with Israel as a whole country.

Elimelech is a type of the nation as a whole.

What Elimelech does is symptomatic of what all Israel is doing. This is Israel in miniature. We get that today, don't we, in journalistic events.

That rather than try and paint the picture of the whole thing, you have one talking head interview with one person caught up in whatever the news story is. And we read about this man that rather than repent and return to the Lord, he relocates to Moab in an act of self-preservation.

[17:20] Rather than see the famine as from God and the answer to the famine is to turn back to God, he sees himself as a kind of do-it-yourself salvation attempt.

And he thinks that his lot is much better in Moab. So he takes his wife and his two sons. And I want to argue that what Elimelech does spatially is exactly what the people of Israel have done spiritually.

Rather than turn to the Lord in repentance, they run from the Lord, they serve the Baals, they trust the fertility gods. No Old Testament Jew would read the opening to the book of Ruth and think going to Moab was a good idea.

Nobody would. Everyone would think that was a horror show of a decision. Let me give you some reasons why. Firstly, it says that he went to sojourn in the country of Moab.

Sojourning was the status of Israel before they got to the promised land. They were sojourners in Egypt. They were sojourners after the Exodus. They were sojourners through the wilderness wanderings.

[18 : 35] But once they get to the promised land, their home, their days of sojourning are over. And so to leave your home and to go back to sojourning is a retrogressive move.

Saying, thank you God for my home, but I preferred camping in the deserts. Secondly, every relocation in the Pentateuch that has been God-ordained has resulted in moving from empty to plenty.

So Abraham goes to Egypt because of a famine, because God told him to. And he returns to Canaan with an abundance of wealth, an abundance of servants, abundance and an abundance of livestock.

We remember Jacob. Do you remember Jacob got, his brother Esau was really angry with him, so he escaped. And he went to live with his uncle Laban in the country of Haran.

And he left with nothing. And he came back with everything. Two wives, 12 sons, loads of herds, loads of flocks, and loads of wealth.

[19 : 45] He moved from empty to plenty on his return. Even Israel, when they went to Egypt in the time of Joseph. That time in Egypt, yes, it was pretty hard at the end, but over the course of the 400 years, it was a time of multiplication and prosperity.

They even plunder the Egyptians just before they leave as some kind of bonus bonus to see them through the wilderness. Even Israel in Egypt moved from empty to plenty.

But what about Elimelech and his family? They moved from empty to emptier. Going to Moab was a bad decision. Thirdly, they moved to Moab.

That's a bad choice. Of all the places you want to go in a famine, Moab should be the very bottom of the list. Moab is an old enemy of God's people.

A people that resulted from the drunken, incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters after they left Sodom. They're like related to the people of God, but it's the side of the family that nobody sends Christmas cards to.

[21 : 04] Not only that, but the Moabites have a history of not being very hospitable and very good at feeding people. They refused to give bread and water to God's people when they came out of Egypt and were passing through Moabite territory.

They're like the worst hosts. And so you're hungry in Bethlehem. Going to Moab is downgrading your opportunity for food, not increasing it. And not only that, but it is also the Moabites who hired Balaam to curse God's people.

And he sent their daughters to intermarry with the Israelites to draw them away from the Lord. And here comes Elimelech with Marlon and Kilion, his unmarried sons, and they go, let's go to Moab.

That's a disastrous idea if you know the story so far. Fourthly, to move from Bethlehem to Moab involves going east. Now we're here in Glasgow.

You know going east is never a good idea. But biblically from Genesis 3 onwards, going east is the direction of exile.

[22 : 13] So when Adam and Eve are thrown out of the garden, they go east. And that's the very picture that's being painted here. Fifthly, Elimelech means in Hebrew, my God is king.

And yet that name proves to be ironic as he moves his family from Moab, from Bethlehem, where God is said to be king, to Moab, where everyone says Chemosh is king.

Chemosh, the king of the Moabites. His actions betray that he does not really believe that Yahweh is king. And actually, throwing his lot back in with Chemosh and the Moabites stands a better chance of him being preserved and him finding food.

Much better moving to team Chemosh and defecting than it is staying with Yahweh and trusting in his promises.

And sixthly, what started as a sojourn in verse one ends up in them living there, verse four, for ten years.

[23 : 22] During that time, there were two weddings and three funerals like a slightly different proportion Richard Curtis movie. Elimelech died.

Marlon and Kilion, whose names incidentally mean sick and frail, take Moabite wives in Orpah and Ruth before living up to their names and proving that they were sick unto death and frail unto death.

And they both died. Interestingly, Chemosh is worshipped by child sacrifice and that's exactly what happens in the life of this family. All the men die.

And so the only person left from the original landing party behind enemy lines in Moab is Naomi, the wife of Elimelech. She has lost her husband and her two sons whilst gaining two Moabite daughters-in-law who are now in the same hopeless predicament as her.

All three of them are destitute widows in the savage Moabite society. Elimelech moved his family to Moab in a do-it-yourself attempt to outdo, outrun, and ignore God's love and kindness.

[24 : 35] And in the end it's an unmitigated disaster. An act of self-preservation turns into Moab being a place of death. It's not a good move.

It's the problem that's going to be rectified throughout the book of Ruth. But before we leave verses 1-5, let's be clear, Elimelech is very like us quite a lot of the time.

We're all quite good at launching our do-it-yourself salvation attempts to the different problems that occur in our lives. We're all quite good at laying down God's loving kindness and thinking we can solve the problem ourselves with our own ingenuity.

This is true of the university student going off to university thinking that the world offers far more fulfilling things than staying connected to Jesus and his people.

Being a little Elimelech, really. I want to cash in what I've got in God through the Lord Jesus and let's go to the world thinking that that will be more fulfilling and more satisfying.

[25 : 49] This is true of the ambitious business person who thinks over committing to their job at the expense of life and service at church offers much better rewards than staying connected to Jesus and his people in the local church.

An act of do-it-yourself salvation, an act of do-it-yourself try and find fulfillment. This is true of the single person or the married person who engages in a totally destructive relationship in an attempt to find satisfaction.

I know what I've got but rather than stick here I'll go for that because that seems to offer more. But be clear like Elimelech going to Moab it's always less.

It will always take you further than you want to go cost you more than you have to give. We all might not be moving to Moab but in our hearts we're all on the cusp of being tempted away and tempted to distrust God and his promises.

Learn clearly from the stark lesson here at the book of Ruth that moving away from the Lord is ultimately choosing death. It is. you might think it's a good move you might think it's a shrewd move you might think it's a better move be clear it's death.

[27 : 13] Any step you take away from the Lord is a step you cannot afford to take. And so we have our three widows in Moab and we get verses 6 to 18 and the day of decision.

Twelve times in the remainder of the chapter we have the verb meaning to turn back or to return. And this is the vital decision that Naomi has to make.

Upon learning that the Lord had visited his people and overturned the famine in providing food she says I need to go home. I need to return.

She probably didn't have much of a say in their relocation in the first place. But now ten years after landing in Moab she comes to her senses and realizes she needs to go home.

But what about Oprah and Ruth? Well they all set out together from the country of Moab. But at some point along the journey they reach a crossroad that provokes the making of the significant decision about where hope is really found in a downward spiraling world.

[28 : 31] Naomi's very clear hope does not lie with me. Verse 8 she said to her daughters-in-law go return each of you to her mother's house.

And then she prays that the Lord would be kind to them and prosper their futures. At this suggestion Ruth and Orpah refuse saying no we will return with you to your people.

And so Naomi has another go this time through a series of rhetorical questions that sharpen the issue of the hopelessness of their direction of travel if they continue with her.

Naomi's persuasive argument centers on Levirate marriage which is going to be such a key in the book of Ruth. And her reasoning is this that the Israelite law states that it was incumbent on the younger brother of the deceased to protect and provide for the families that were left.

So if Marlon and Kilion had had a younger brother it would be incumbent upon him to look after Ruth and Orpah. But the problem is Naomi only had two sons.

[29 : 51] Sick and frail and one was too sick and one was too frail and they're both dead. And so there's no one to stand in the gap. There's no one to redeem them. And that's exactly what Naomi says.

I have no sons. I don't even have a husband. I'm very old. Even if I had a husband tonight would you wait 16 years until you could marry him?

Would you wait until you're in your early 40s before having another shot of life? Naomi wakes Orpah and Ruth up to the fact that there are no brothers in the present and there is no hope of brothers in the future.

to stay with Naomi is to resign yourself to hopelessness. Well Orpah's convinced. Orpah kisses Ruth and turns back to Moab.

But Ruth clung to her. That cling verb is what people normally do to gods. And that's what Ruth does.

[31 : 00] she is all in. She clings to Naomi like a limpet and comes out with the most astonishing confession of faith in the Old Testament. If the call of the Lord Jesus is this, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, then Ruth gets pretty close to an expanded version of that as an Old Testament Moabite saying that she is all in with the Lord and his people.

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.

Where you die, I will die and there will I be buried. May the Lord, the covenant name of God, do so to me and more also. If anything but death parts me from you.

that looks very like taking up your cross, denying yourself and following. Standing in stark contrast to Elimelech the Israelite who proves to be a defector with his sojourn to Moab, Ruth, the Moabite shows herself to be thoroughly converted and completely abandoned to the purpose promises and people of God.

Ruth, the Moabite, the most rank outsider now finds herself amongst God's people included in his covenant blessing.

[32 : 35] Let's just pause there for a moment. This is what the Abrahamic covenant looks like if it was an equation. God's people in God's place, living under God's rule, enjoying God's presence, results in blessing overflowing to the world.

That's how the equation works. God's people in God's place, under God's rule, enjoying God's presence. When those things are in place, what happens is blessing overflows to the world. Unfortunately, it is seldom seen in the Old Testament. We've actually seen it once so far. at the very beginning of Joshua when Rahab gets it and she realized hope is to be aligned to God and his people.

We're going to see it again when the Queen of Sheba comes to visit Solomon and aligns herself with God and his people. Twice in the Old Testament.

In the whole Old Testament, you get that equation working. God's people in God's place, under God's rule, enjoying God's presence, overflowing to blessings of the world.

[33 : 52] It doesn't look great for Gentile people if 2,000 years of the Abrahamic covenant turns out to be two Gentile women getting in. Hope doesn't look that great for the world.

But I think Ruth shows that actually it's not going to lie. Actually, with God's people's faithfulness is going to lie with God's sovereignty. You could not get a worse evangelist than Naomi.

I mean, she is having a shocker of an evangelistic conversation with Ruth. I trusted the Lord. He took everything for her from me. I'm now traipsing home knowing that nothing is there for me but death.

And Ruth goes, I want a slice of that. it's incredibly encouraging that it turns out God is sovereign over his mission.

God is the one who is going to see the Gentile people flood into his kingdom. He's going to be the one that makes the gospel get to the ends of the earth.

[35 : 01] He's the reason the gospel has taken root and borne fruit in even Glasgow. Ruth stands here as a great encouragement to us that the rank outside of Ruth gets in not because of the faithfulness of God's people but because of the sovereign goodness of God himself.

Not only that but if we read on we'll find out that Ruth finds her way into the genealogy of the Lord Jesus great David's greatest son. that will prove his credentials not just to be the king of Israel but

to be the king of the whole world.

Our king. Your king. My forever king. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. And so there's great hope here.

If Ruth gets in you can get in. If Ruth finds a place you can find a place. It doesn't matter who you are what you've done where you are now the sovereign God of the universe has plans to bring you home.

Even you home in order that you might have hope in a downward spiraling world. That's why Ruth's story Naomi's story can be our story because this God who stands behind this story is the God who stands behind our story.

[36 : 29] The call to be all in is still the same but the blessing if we do is unimaginable. And so the repeated refrain of Ruth 1 is return, come back, turn back, come home.

And it still resounds to us today. And so we had the agony of apostasy, we had the day of decision and now 19 to 22 we have the hint of hope.

the journey is complete. Ruth the Moabite and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem. It's a small backwater town so all the curtains start twitching in every window in the town.

People cannot believe that the wife and mother who left a decade earlier has returned. And what a time she's had in Moab. She's now widowed, she has no sons, and she's destitute.

Is this Naomi they ask? They cannot believe this woman who left has sunk so low. She says don't call me Naomi, don't call me sweet, call me bitter, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

[37 : 52] She's at the end of herself. She's bitter and empty. she left with hope, she's come back hopeless. The trauma of her Moabite episode rises to the surface.

She acknowledges that God has been sovereign over all these events. She was sweet, she's now bitter, she was full, and now she's empty.

But there's great grace here, verse 21. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back. But it seems that God is up to something.

She does not realize it, she cannot see it, but the Lord has brought her back. work. This is going to be the story that Naomi's emptiness and bitterness will not be the final words over her life.

The invisible hand of her sovereign God is already at work to abundantly bless his empty, returning prodigal daughter. She's not completely empty.

[39 : 07] At her side stands a Christian Moabite daughter-in-law in Ruth. He will prove to be God's conduit of abundant blessing. And even against the backdrop of famine-torn Israel, we read that it is the beginning of barley harvest.

That is good news. It's interesting, famine brought about by droughts. And Ruth's name means downpour.

So it turns out that the rain has returned for the crops and Ruth has returned for abundant blessing on God's people, not just in the immediate, but on into eternity.

The hint of hope is there for Ruth, that scraping an existence on the margins might finally give way to rest for this weary wanderer. And the first readers of this book were probably Israelites in exile in Babylon.

And this story would have resonated with them, the story of a lost people in a far away land. In the life of Naomi, it would have resonated because they too are far away and they're empty.

[40 : 21] They too are far away and don't think there's any hope. They too are east of the promised land and can't seem to get home. They too are a people who once had so much and have now been stripped of everything.

Yet Ruth one would have brought them hope because if God brought Naomi back, he will bring them back. Maybe there was hope even for them in their downward spiraling world as there was hope for Naomi in her downward spiraling world.

maybe failure and unfaithfulness would not be the defining feature of their lives as they live in Babylon. But they too might be brought back to experience the goodness and kindness of God if they would but just turn and return to him.

The same way I think Ruth one resonates with you and with me. For those away from the Lord God has done everything to make that possible.

Just keep going. Keep moving closer. Keep drawing closer. Keep turning to the Lord and he'll do the rest.

[41 : 48] But maybe you're here and you're walking with the Lord. You haven't wandered away. Well let Ruth one encourage you to not depart and to never depart.

We're only ever moving in one direction. We're only ever moving in one direction. We're either moving closer to the Lord in faithfulness or we're moving further away from the Lord in unfaithfulness.

We cannot stand still in our relationship with the Lord. We're either growing or dying. We're either moving in or we're moving away.

And Ruth one says don't move away. Keep moving in. Keep turning and returning to the Lord. Keep growing in dependence not growing in distance.

Friends be clear that turning to the sovereign Lord is the only hope, has only ever been the only hope in a downward spiraling world. And Ruth one says come home, stay home and be home forever.

[42 : 54] One thing in closing, how do we know that Naomi is the rule and not the exception? How can we be sure that God will welcome even me if I come home?

Well standing beside Naomi in the town of Bethlehem is Ruth the Moabite and choosing to come to Israel is to choose to be a stigmatized woman. All the way through the book she's always referred to as Ruth the Moabite.

She is ethnically different and ethnically dodgy and the writer wants us to know that's the same all the way through. Some 1200 years later another woman would arrive in Bethlehem.

She too would be stigmatized not because she's a foreigner but because she's pregnant and she is not married. Yet this woman the mother of the Lord Jesus in this birth would bring about blessing not just to Israel but to the world forever.

And this Jesus who was born who lived who died who was raised who's ascended he's the one who ensures that we will be welcomed by God no matter who we are no matter what we've done or no matter where we are.

[44 : 10] He is the one who says there's always home and there's always hope in a downward spiraling world. This Jesus who was born would go on and tell a story that would very closely map onto the story of Naomi.

You've probably heard about it. It's a man who had two sons. It's quite familiar. And the younger son tells his father that he wished he was dead. And he's going to act like he is.

The younger son takes his share of the inheritance and moves to a far off country where he lives a life of wild debauchery that promised much but robs him of everything. He ends up totally destitute without hope.

The son ends up like Naomi. He's in a pigsty. He's jealous of the pigs because they're eating and he's not. Eventually he comes to his senses and turns for home hoping beyond hope that his father will give him some sort of job as a slave.

But to his surprise when he is still a dot on the horizon a long way from home the father runs to him hugs him and sets about restoring him to hope-filled sonship.

[45 : 27] Friends this is who God is. This is who the father of our Lord Jesus Christ is. No one else has a God who runs to embrace prodigals and has done everything imaginable in order that they might be restored forever.

A God who in loving kindness will allow his children to become hopelessly empty in order that they might come home to him in order to be abundantly filled with eternal hope.

friends this will be our experience if we do just turn and we do just stay and we do just keep moving closer to God's independence.

Friends this is hope in a downward spiraling world and it is here and only here that we'll find our happily ever after. Let's pray.

Jesus says but while he was still a long way off his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

[46 : 41] Father God we read those words and we're astonished at the God that you are. A God of grace a God of forgiveness a God of sovereignty a God who is intimately involved in the details of our lives and is doing all things in order that you might be eternally glorified and we might be eternally blessed.

So Lord where we're wandering bring us back Father where we're tempted bring us to our senses and Father in the areas of our lives where we're close to you Father we long to be closer still.

Father thank you in the Lord Jesus we have eternal hope in a fallen downward spiraling world. And so Lord make this real to us make it dear to us.

Father may we adorn this hope in a way that provokes people to see a real difference and to ask questions about where hope is found. And may we have the pleasure saying hope is found in Jesus and only ever in Jesus.

say Lord bless us and help us and keep us close we pray in Jesus name. Amen.