

Naomi – From Bitterness to Blessing

Intro

Naomi is one of the three main characters of the book of Ruth. It's set 3000 years ago, 1000 years before Jesus, within a difficult period of Israelite life; the time of the judges. The backdrop to the story is famine and harvest, poverty, and prosperity.

Above all it's a story of God's action within the circumstances of our lives. God is hidden from direct gaze but is actively at work, sustaining and guiding.

Naomi is deeply troubled by the catastrophe that has fallen upon her, moving with her husband away from Bethlehem in search of prosperity she returns to her hometown Bethlehem empty. Naomi's husband and two sons have died; only Ruth, the Moabite daughter in law, returns with her.

Bitterness

"When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said 'can this be Naomi?'" (Ruth 1:19)

Naomi is anything but excited to be back, only survival as brought her home. In Israelite culture a name was intended to describe character, Naomi means 'pleasantness'. Naomi feels anything but pleasant.

'How can they call her pleasant when the almighty has pronounced disaster on her' (Frederick Bush)

'Do not call me Naomi', she replied. 'Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very *bitter*. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty'. (Ruth 1:20)

Naomi uses the name Shaddai twice to describe God, but I don't believe that it is said in affection and honour. Interestingly the Hebrew name Shaddai can be connected to two other Hebrew words, mountain and devastate. Naomi felt that the one that should have been her rock became the one who devastated her life.

(Christ on the cross)

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, '*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'). (Matthew 27:45-46)

Jesus, a descendant of Naomi, understood her desolation and all human desolation when he perished upon the cross. On the cross Jesus cried out in anguish to 'why have you

forsaken me'. Jesus experienced the cup of Mara 'bitterness' when he died feeling abandoned on the cross.

We all go through these times.

Blessing

"And the women said to Naomi, '*blessed* be the Lord who has not withheld a redeemer from you today. He will renew your life and sustain your old age, for he is born of your daughter in law, who loves you and is better to you than 7 sons'. (Ruth 4:14a, 15)

This child represents Naomi's full recovery from the emotional and spiritual famine she suffered in the book's opening, and symbolizes a complete reversal of Naomi's ill fortune, her restoration to fullness and the continuation of her family. (Adele Reinhartz)

(Christ of the resurrection)

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:50-53)

Jesus' disciples moved toward blessedness. We can experience the movement out of bitterness to blessedness.

Conclusion

'Its central theme is the movement from emptiness to fulfilment'. Adele Reinhartz
From bitterness to blessedness.

Questions

1. Can you relate to Naomi, do you see bitterness and blessedness within your own life?
2. What do you think of the expression 'hidden presence'? Do you find it a helpful or unhelpful expression, why?
3. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz are ancestors of Jesus, all four of these people followed God but experienced suffering in some way. Is that thought a help or hindrance to your faith, why?