

“Prayers, Promises and God”

Living Wisely in an Unwise World

Ruth 1:6-18

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Jeff: Sig sent me a note last night saying, “Hey, no pressure or anything.” *(Laughter)* “But I’m pretty sure that Bruce is going to be there.” *(Laughter)*

I said, “Thanks for telling me the night before.” *(Laughter)* And he never sent word back, so I’m not quite sure what that means.

Also, I want to quickly say this. I know some of you have said something about my beard looking more like a prophet than well kept. But I want to tell you that I’m saving it for February. I have something coming in February, although I hope to keep it a little bit more trimmed before that. But I was telling Dave. I won’t mention who I was talking to. I was telling him and I said that when February comes I want to die it gray.

And he goes, “I hate to tell you this, brother, but it’s already there.” *(Laughter)* So anyway, with that why don’t we pray? Don, would you lead us into prayer, please?
(Music)

Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful for this day. We’re thankful for it because it’s a day where we can get out of bed and recognize that You reign over all things, and that we belong to You through the Lord Jesus Christ and possess every abundance of blessing in Him.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Father, as we thank You for this day, we are mindful that we have the privilege of gathering together and studying Your word. Father, we are so thankful for that, and we pray that You’ll bless us. Bless us with change. Make us different today than we were yesterday because of Your word and Your Spirit in our lives.

Father, we pray that You will not only bless us as we study, but that You would bless our families while we’re apart from them. Bless the work of our hands which You’ll put them to later today. And Father, we pray that we will do work for Your kingdom as we do our daily labors.

Father, we also continue to pray for Sandy. We plead on behalf of her, asking that You will grant her health and healing. We know, Lord, that You’re able to do all things and even more than we ask. And so we ask that on her behalf, knowing that we commit her to Your will and to Your hands, where she is in the safest place.

Father, we are also thankful for Bruce and for his presence here today. We’re thankful for his continued wellness. And Lord, we pray for his continued recovery. We certainly lift him up to You as he moves toward p. t., and ask that this would do even more good for him. And Father, we pray that You would not only bless him to be more active, but we also pray that He’ll be able to come back and teach us again.

Father, we ask and pray that You will be with the Sproul family in their loss. And Father, we’re thankful for such a life as his. We’re thankful that many of us were able to encounter his teaching early in our development. And Father, we praise and give You thanks for men like him. But Lord, we pray for his family as they grieve today. And we

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ask that Your hand would be upon them. Lord, bless us now. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right.

Participant: Jeff, you may want to mention the passing of R. C. Maybe a lot of guys don't know about that.

Jeff: Yes. I'll just say a word about R. C. Sproul. He was actually a figure who was born and raised in Pittsburgh. He had a study center here in Ligonier for a long time before he moved to Florida. He kept the name Ligonier Study Center. You are probably well aware of it. But he was 78 years old and had respiratory illness and complications with the flu and ended up dying yesterday at 78 years old.

So there are a lot of variables there as you think about his ministry, as you think about Reformation Bible college, those kinds of things. We ought to be praying for his ministry as it continues, because it's had an impact on so many of us and so many in the country and in the world.

Well today we're going to continue looking at the book of Ruth. And I want us to look today at Ruth 1:6-18. And as we look at this, this is our last morning in chapter 1. We're going to be moving on after this. But I want us again to revisit some passages, some verses that we've already looked at. Can I get somebody with a good strong voice to read Ruth 1:6-18? Don? Sure. Thank you.

Don: This is from the New King James.

Jeff: Okay.

Don: *“Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.*

“And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, ‘Surely we will return with you to your people.’

“But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!’

“Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, ‘Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said:

*‘Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;*

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*For wherever you go I will go;
And wherever 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.
The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.’*

“When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.”

This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay. Let me just catch us up a little bit. We’ve been looking at the book of Ruth. And one of the things that we’ve been considering is the fact that there’s a context to this passage.

Now one of the things that we have to remember is that we sometimes have to dig deep in order to get to the context. But we have to make sure that we’re not performing an isogesis, where we’re reading what we want into the text. We’ve got to read out from the text. And one of the things we looked at the last time we were together was what is there.

And we were able to notice in those first five verses that progression of thinking that indicated that there was at least the idea that they were going to Moab for a brief period of time. They were going to sojourn there. They were only going to be there temporarily. They went down to a field. And you get the idea then that they were exchanging an unproductive field for a productive one.

And the problem was that they didn’t stay there temporarily. This turned into that they remained there. And then the next phrase: *“they were there ten years.”*

And so there’s this sense that as we look at the text we see that a temporary visit turns into a long stay. And that has behind it all that we thought about with regard to thinking about whether it was a wise decision for them to go there. Was it wise for them to leave the land of promise and go down to the land of Moab? Though it may not have been strictly forbidden, there was enough there that one might have said, “This is not a wise decision for us to go down to the land of Moab.” After all, this was the land that was not allowed to enter into the assembly of God’s people because they had been folks who hindered the Israelites along the exodus route. They had also enticed the young men of Israel and seduced them into idolatry with their women.

So this was not a wise thing to do. And we see the intermarriage between the children of this family and the women of Moab.

So it is not a good thing that is happening there. This is a tough situation for them to be in. And even if it was unintentional, the unintentional decision led to some real difficulty.

Well we also noticed the last time we got together that this situation as it stands in the background has something important that we need to stand up and take notice of. It was the word *return*. We noticed that this author is teaching us something in these first verses

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of the chapter. And that is that there is a return of Naomi and Ruth as she goes with her to the land of promise. And we learned the last time that the word for *return* is not just a geographical move, although it can be, and it's here. But that's the favorite word in the Old Testament for *repentance*. So there's a repentance that's going on here.

Now we may say, “Well, Naomi's repentance needs some repenting.” And we talked about that last time. But we also need to understand this not only in terms of Naomi's repentance, but this is Ruth's repentance. And we see that even more clearly perhaps than we see Naomi's.

Naomi is struggling. She returns home and they say, “Isn't this Naomi?” And she says, “No, the LORD is bitter and He's judging against me and calamity has been my path.” When you look at Ruth, Ruth is the example of the believer who has turned away from idolatry and moves into the land of promise to be near her God. And Naomi's God is going to be her God.

So one of the wonderful things about this is that you have two people, I think both believers, at different stages in their walk, in different places. You know, here's a young woman, so it seems, who is coming to the Lord fresh, who perhaps lightly came to the Lord while in Moab. But here is a woman who has been in the Lord a long time. And because of her choices, she has had a hard, hard path and now is repenting, turning from that way and coming back. And yet her repentance is in need of repentance. And so that's the background, that's the context.

I basically have an outline that I want us to look at today. And so I want us to think about some introductory points. First of all I want to take you through a series of questions that I think are important for the background of what we're going to do today. Secondly I want us to look at the fact that Naomi knew the promises of God.

That's going to be important. Why? Because Naomi is supposed to apply the promises of God when she prays. She doesn't do that. We'll see that in just a minute. And that's the second point. She fails to apply the promises of God in her prayer.

But then there's this really wonderful point, and it's the third point I want to share with you. And that is that God is successful applying these promises despite us. And I think that when I read the story of Ruth, there are so many threads here to think about. But one of the things that I often think about is how generous and gracious and kind God is to Naomi. Even in her broken way of applying the promises of God in her prayer, God takes and weeds out the weeds as it were, and answers them the way they ought to be answered. And I think it's just an absolutely beautiful thing when you see it in its context like that. So those are the things that I want us to look at today.

Let's get to the three preliminary questions that I want us to think about. When we think about these preliminary questions, they are contextual. They get us thinking about the story and what I want us to think about today. So let's just look at them. And they may feel a little bit out of context, but they'll get there.

First of all, *what is prayer?* You may look at this text and you may say, “Well I'm not sure I see the prayer in the text.” And maybe that's the way you're feeling. I want you to take note of what I said earlier. We'll get to that. (*Laughter*)

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So what is prayer? Well, in its simplest form, it’s people talking to God. But there’s a definition that I like and it’s a broader definition. So this isn’t all of it. If you want more of what he says, you can find it in B. B. Warfield’s sermon, *Prayer as a Means of Grace*.

But this is what Warfield says. Warfield says, “*What is prayer but an adoring appearing before God, with a confession of our need and helplessness and a petition for His strength and blessing?*”

Now when I look at that I think, okay. Here are the three components of prayer—appearing before Him in an adoring and loving way, recognizing my own need, and also recognizing His ability to supply that need. So I think those three things are in this definition or description of prayer by Warfield. And those are the things that we need to see as we see them in the text, especially the latter two.

Naomi doesn’t have the first one yet. It’s almost taken for granted who she is, her standing. But the latter two are things that come into focus as we think about prayer and what it is.

But now I want you to look at the text. Look at verses 8 and 9. The reason I say that this is a prayer is that in verses 8 and 9 it has this wish formula. “*But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD’*”, that wish formula. “*May the LORD.*”

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: Now one of the things that I’d say is this. Notice that she is wishing to the Lord. She is seeking the Lord as it were in her wish for the two girls. Notice what she says. “*May the LORD deal kindly with you.*” In other words, may He give to you loving-kindness.

But then look at verse 9. “*The LORD grant that you may find rest.*” And so there’s a sense in which it’s almost as if that it’s not her going into her prayer closet, granted. But it is her standing on the border of Moab basically saying, “May the LORD do this to you.” And it’s not prayer in its strictest sense, as we might think of it. But it is Naomi asking the Lord on behalf of these girls.

And so she stands on the border of Moab, she prays. And we might even say that she recognizes their need. And she recognizes God’s ability to supply that need. So those two things are there.

So secondly, *what is a promise?* Keep that in mind in terms of prayer. Now what is a promise? Well when you think about the etymology of the word *promise*, it means to send ahead.

So if I promise, if I say to my son, “Later today at 5:00 we will do this, that or the other,” I’ve sent my word ahead. And he knows that when 5:00 comes around, we are going to be doing what I’ve said at 8:00 in the morning we would do. I’ve sent my word ahead.

Now that’s really important. I think it’s really important, especially when we think about it in terms of how we ought to respond to God in prayer by using His promises.

Now what do I mean by that? Well I mean this. And if you want to go here with me, it’s Isaiah 62. How do we put promises and prayer together? I think this is just a wonderful text. Isaiah 62, verses 6 and 7. “*On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set*

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watchmen, all the day and all the night. They shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest. And give Him no rest until He establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth.”

Now what is the Lord saying through His prophet? He’s saying this. He’s saying that the watchmen of Jerusalem—may we say the elders of Jerusalem?—and certainly the people as they follow, are to plead with God that God would do what He promised to do, to make Jerusalem a city of praise. In other words God is saying that the watchmen, the prayers of Israel, “are to give Me no rest until I do what I promise to do.”

That, I think, is a wonderful picture of prayer, of a person in prayer applying the promises of God to achieve what God has indeed promised. And you get God being the source of inspiration for that sort of thing.

I want you to think about another example of this. I want you to think about the Lord Jesus Himself. Think about what Jesus does. He prays. And one of the things that we’re told in the Psalms, in Psalm 2, is that He prays. He asks the Father for the nations to be given to Him. Psalm 2. “*Ask of Me,*” says the Father, “*and I will give You the nations as Your inheritance.*” In other words, the Father is saying to the Son in His mediatorial stage, “When You are incarnate, when You are in the flesh among the people of Israel, ask Me for the nations and I’ll give them to You as an inheritance.”

And the Lord Jesus prays. And what do we find at the end of His earthly life before He ascends into heaven? He says, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.*” In other words, the Son has done what the Father said to do. And the Father has answered that prayer, such that the Son now has authority over all nations.

So when you think about praying, and you think about praying the promises, you even see that in the life of the Lord Himself. And so we as Christians ought to be learning the promises of God and pleading them. Okay?

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: So with the prayer and the promises in this text I want you to think about it as we bring these things together as we look at the text. What’s the promise? God’s promise is that He’s going to be steadfastly loving to the people of Israel. Here you have Naomi praying that promise. God has promised the people rest. Here you have Naomi praying that promise, okay?

So you have Naomi, who is familiar with the promises of God, praying that these women experience those promises and the fulfillment of those promises. Now with that introduction I mind let’s look a little more at our first point. But before we do, any questions about those preliminary things?

Participant: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes? You notice that I haven’t been looking over here. (*Laughter*) I’m trying to shield out any questions pertaining to this phrase.

Participant: When you’re talking about Psalm 2, am I understanding you correctly that in a sense it’s for Christ when He’s incarnate, praying a prayer?

Jeff: Yes. It’s a Messianic psalm, and there are different people talking there. So, for instance, “*Why do the nations rage?*” This is the Psalmist. And then in verses 4-6 you

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have God acting and speaking. *“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath.”* Then in verse 6, *“As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.”* And then the Messiah speaks in verse 7.

“The LORD said to Me,

‘You are My Son;

Today I have begotten You.

Ask of Me and I will make the nations Your inheritance.”

And then the Psalmist returns in view in verse 10. So there’s a lot of activity going on in there in terms of speakers. But it’s a Messianic Psalm, with the Son recognizing what the Father has asked Him to do in terms of asking the Father for the nations.

Participant: And when Jesus prayed that as a young man, He would get that?

Jeff: Well, He grew in wisdom and knowledge. And so I think that as the Holy Spirit took from the Divine and bestowed upon the human in that wonderful union, I think that the humanity of Christ grew up in that knowledge.

Participant: Thank you. Great answer.

Jeff: Okay. So Naomi knows the promises of God. Let’s think about that for just a little bit. Naomi knows the promises of God.

Let’s just think about the petitions and the promises that are here for a minute. The first petition is that *these girls will experience loving-kindness, or chesed.* Okay?

What is that? What does that mean? Well, I’ll tell you what. I should say this before I tell you what I think it means in terms of the Scriptures. One of the things that I think you’ll find is that when you look at various translations, you’ll find that this word *chesed* is translated *steadfast love, loving-kindness, love, covenantal love.* It’s translated in a number of different ways. The question is what does it mean?

Well, it’s one of those pregnant words that is really that big. And so translators are trying to pull in all of those ideas of this very pregnant word.

Well I think that one of the things that’s really helpful is when we apply the analogy of Scripture when we’re trying to understand a word like this one. What’s *the analogy of Scripture?* The analogy of Scripture is when you take one particular passage and use it to understand another. And I think that when we apply that simple rule to this particular word, one of the things that we find is a helpful way of understanding what it means.

So for instance, in Deuteronomy 7:12, Moses says this. He says, *“The LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that He swore to your fathers.”*

Now I think that when you understand this together, I think it’s a *parallelism.* And I think what that means is that *covenant* and *steadfast love*, or our word *chesed*, are used synonymously. In other words, when we think about *chesed*, we can think about *covenant.* And when we think about *covenant*, we can think about *steadfast love.* And I think that’s one helpful way for us to think about what it means.

Now I’m glad we have that cleared up. *(Laughter)*

Participant: Moving right along.

Jeff: Moving right along. I mean when you think about *covenant*, especially a *covenant with God*, you don’t think of a *parity covenant.* You don’t think of me entering

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onto a covenant and of it being mutual. No, you think of it being a one-sided covenant. God is the One who condescends to enter into a covenant with us. And He is the One who not only asks for the conditions. But He enables those conditions to be met. This is a one-sided covenant with God.

But the wonderful thing about it is that when you go to verse 13 of Deuteronomy 7, there’s something of an answer to this question.

Well what does that mean, that *covenant* and *steadfast love* are synonymous terms? Well let’s look at it.” *He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock in the land He swore to your forefathers to give you.*”

Now that is just a full, robust description of what *chesed* means, of what it means to be in covenant with God. God is the One who is going to enter into this covenant. And He is the One who is going to satisfy all of those requirements.

But one thing I want you to notice is this. Where does all of this blessing take place? In the land. And that’s the very next thing I want you to notice in terms of the petition. She asks God to grant them rest.

Now I want you to look at a couple of verses. I want you to look at Numbers chapter 10 for a minute. Or you can just hear it read. Jot it down; look at it later for yourselves. Numbers 10, verse 33. Listen to this. *“So they set out from the mount of the LORD for three days journey. And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them three days journey, to seek out a resting place for them.”*

So this is the Exodus journey. And the ark of the covenant is going before them, seeking out a place of rest.

Okay. Now Psalm 132, verses 8, 13 and 14.
*“Arise, O LORD, and go to Your resting-place,
You and the ark of Your might.”*

And then verses 13 and 14.
*“For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His dwelling place. ‘This is My resting place forever.
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.’”*

Now what are we being told here? We’re being told that *resting place* and *the land of promise* are used synonymously. And when you look at the Scriptures, one of the things that you realize is, you realize that that is the way that the land of promise is described—the resting place, that place of rest, the land of rest. And so when Naomi says, *“May the LORD grant you rest”*, how can we not think that she doesn’t have in mind those blessings that one receives while in the land of rest?

So there’s a sense in which Naomi here is taking the promises of God—*chesed* and land—and she is applying them in what she’s asking on behalf of these girls, okay?

How about this last one? Petition #3, *husbands*. And husbands, you know, lead to children. And you know what Deuteronomy 7:13 says. Deuteronomy 7:13 said that *“He will multiply you.”* This is the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant was *“He will make you as many as the sand on the seashore, as many as the stars in the heavens.”*

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He'll multiply you. Well, we have to have children to multiply, right? You have to have a husband in order to have children.

And so she's asking that they be granted husbands in the land, when and where they receive *chesed*. So this is Naomi taking what she knows as a Jewish believer. And she's putting them into prayer.

Okay. Let's think about the next point—*applying the promises*. But before we do that, do you have any questions? Do you want to interact at all about this? Yes, Ted?

Ted: I'm thinking about a resting place. I think about Jesus talking about abiding in Him. And I've thought of *resting* and *abiding* as being very similar terms.

Jeff: Yes. In fact, I would say to you to step back, Ted. And look at these things from a believer's viewpoint. Christ embodies the *chesed* of God. Christ embodies the resting place. Christ is our Husband. When you step back and look at this from a Christological angle, it's just beautiful, isn't it?

And then it's sort of like what I said the last time. When you think about it, here's this woman leaving because there's no bread in the bread basket, Bethlehem. She comes back because there's bread in the bread basket. We need to apply that to ourselves and say to ourselves, “If we are in Christ, there is never a time when the bread basket is empty.”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Because the Bread of Life abides in us, and we in Him. So just apply that. When you start to say to yourselves, ‘You know, I feel so cold. I feel like the Lord is distant from me.’ You know right there that you're lying to yourself. The Lord is not distant from you. You're distant from the Lord. And you need to do what James 4 says. “*Draw near to Him, that He may draw near to you.*” You see, that's the idea. So that's a great thought. Yes?

Participant: So those were the Old Testament promises.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: The blessing upon the land. So is the New Testament promise as simple as Christ, and our calling from sanctification into glorification? Is that when we'll see that our real promise is Christ?

Jeff: Well, right. The promise of all of these things is Christ. He's the fulfillment of them all. It's sort of like that he is that to which the types and the shadows and the ceremonies and the sacrifices and all of those things were pointing to. Did you want to follow up on that?

Participant: Yes, I was going to. But we can't expect them if we're not in the land.

Jeff: Right. I see what you mean. So Jesus says, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Now go.*” There was one time that the nations would flow up to Jerusalem. Now that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ through His mediatorial reign, He now says, “*Go into all the nations and make disciples.*” So there's a sense in which that fulfillment of promise means a different direction for the believer. Does that make sense?

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: Okay. Make it an easy one, John.

John: Hebrews chapter 4 is quite essential to God's rest.

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Jeff: Yes.

John: Why don't you elaborate on that?

Jeff: Well I think there's a sense in which there are two different words going on there for *rest*. I think one of them indicates rest in Christ. The fulfillment of the old has come. And yet I personally think that what he's saying there is that there is a Sabbath rest that remains. In other words, there is a Sabbath rest that points to that eternal day rest that we will enjoy. So though the rest has come, there is a rest to come.

And I think that you see that in this. Let me give you an example. In the old administration of the covenant, when was the Sabbath?

Men: Saturday.

Jeff: Saturday. The first or last day of the week?

Men: Last.

Jeff: Saturday, the last day of the week. So what happened? You worked and then you rested. In the new administration of the covenant, when is the Lord's Day?

Men: The first day of the week.

Jeff: The first day of the week. The idea is that you rest and then you work. The idea then is that if you look at the Old Testament, what was it that summarized the covenant? Do this and live. So work, then rest. In the New Covenant, with Jesus' fulfillment, what is it? Jesus worked. And so we rest in Him. And because we rest in Him, our work flows out of what He's done for us. So the idea of rest and then work is a beautiful summary, a theological summary. I think the way the Sabbath has changed in its day not only indicates that there's an eternal rest that comes, and it reminds us of that. But the change of it reminds us that it was do this and then live. Jesus did this and therefore we all live. And because we live, we follow Him. I think that's the idea. Yes, Ted?

Ted: I think this is for the experience of Christians as they mature. Early in your life, often for many of us, you work. You become a believer. You receive salvation and all that that means. But you are still thinking *work*.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And as you mature, you come to the place of resting in Him more because you see how futile the work is.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: I mean I can look back on my early Christian life, thinking about I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that. I couldn't go to this movie and I had to do this. I had to have a quiet time, and I had to do this and I had to do this. So do lots of work.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Now we work towards the goal. Then we will work out the goal.

Jeff: Yes. Well, now we definitely work from the Lord's work, right?

Participant: Well, I thought you were talking about the idea that we haven't arrived yet. So we're working towards that. We work toward our sanctification, and then we work it out.

Jeff: Oh. So you and I might have a different view about sanctification. We'll talk.
(Laughter)

Participant: We've already been sanctified.

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Jeff: Don't go there, Ted. *(Laughter)* We'll talk later. *(Laughter)*

Participant: But we are mature.

Second Participant: Is this rest the same as being in Christ?

Jeff: Say that again. Is this rest the same as—This rest is the same as having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So think of faith spelled with a k, cat spelled with a k. Think of it as having knowledge of the Lord and His promises, even rudimentary knowledge of His promises and who He is. Think of it as assenting or agreeing to that knowledge you have, and then a life of trust in that. And think about faith as then being my Spirit-enabled response to the gospel or to Christ—believing in the promises, believing in Him, what the Scriptures say, who He is, that sort of thing.

Participant: I won't go there where Ted was going. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yes, thanks. I appreciate that.

Participant: I like the way you pointed out the covenant being related to steadfast love. A lot of times we look at a covenant as a contract. You have a contract with the bank to pay off the mortgage. *(Unclear)* A covenant in Scripture is always personal.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. It's a relationship. I love the Children's Catechism. *“What is a covenant? A covenant is a relationship that God sets up with us and guarantees by His word.”*

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: I love that. All right. So let's think about some of these promises. Now I want you just quickly to think about the social context. Remember that the social context is during the time of the Judges, and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.

I want you to think about the theological context. And I'm going to move rather quickly through these. I want you to think about how Naomi may have thought about God theologically.

There are four possibilities. First of all, she may have thought about God as a mere idol. Now I don't think that was the case. But it's a possibility. Naomi may have been an idolater. But that's not the case, I don't think.

Think about how she's applying these promises to the girls. Secondly, think about how God would be willing to transgress His own covenant. In other words, maybe it was that Naomi said, “Well, you know what? Maybe God, being God, is willing to step outside His own covenant and bless these girls in the land He hasn't promised to bless anyone in. Maybe God would be willing to do that.”

She's forgotten who God is, right? He's bound by His own word because He binds Himself by it. But then what does she do?

How about this? She was just being nice. You know, it could have been that at God's expense she was just being nice. Her theology allowed her to be nice instead of good, right? We say that we always want to teach our daughters to be good and not nice, right? *(A chuckle)* But maybe she's being nice instead of good. Maybe she's being nice.

And so she says, “Well what would encourage these girls? I'll just use God language for them and maybe that will encourage them. They've heard me use it a number of times, and I'll send them away and be nice to them.”

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But maybe it was that she was pressing her theology beyond what it could bear. And I think that this is probably what she’s doing. I want you to consider this possibility. She’s saying this to herself. Since God’s intent was to bless all the nations, maybe she had a right understanding of the covenant, of the Abrahamic covenant. Abraham and his descendants were to be a blessing to all the nations. And these girls, at least one of them—not Orpah, but Ruth—had experienced the blessings of the covenant already. Well then, maybe they could return and live the life of blessing in the land of Moab.

You can see theologically how she’s making that move, right? I mean you can see how that might be done. We do it all the time in order to justify ourselves, don’t we? I mean, you can see it. I’m not saying that she did this. But I’m saying that it’s a possibility.

And here’s what I want to tell you. What’s the difference between her saying that to these girls—go back with that understanding in mind,—and say, somebody like Naaman in 2 Kings? Remember when Naaman says to the proper, “Look. I want to take the Spirit back with me. I want to worship God. But you need to know that I’m going to support the king as he goes in and bows down to Rimmon. But I want you to know that my heart is God’s, and I’m not going to be doing that.”

What’s the difference between the two of them? I’ll tell you the difference between the two of them. Naaman is saying, “I’m going to worship God and I’m only there as a steady post for the king as he does this.” Naomi says, “*Go back to your people and to your gods.*” There is a distinct difference between Naaman and what Naomi is encouraging these girls to do.

So the question becomes how are you treating God? I think that when it comes to applying the promises of God, we have to ask ourselves what’s our theology? Because I want to tell you something. We are going to pray out of our theology. We’re going to understand God’s promises and so apply them in prayer theologically. So we’d better have a right understanding of God when we go to prayer, when we pray for people. You see what I mean? God becomes the foundational point for promises and praying those promises.

And obviously Naomi does not have a good foundation. I mean, she may. But she’s not praying out of a good foundation. She seems like she’s saying, “Let’s stretch, God. Let’s see if we can accommodate these girls.”

Well let’s think about the last point: *God and His promises*. One of the things that I’d say to you is this. This can be discouraging. Looking at this, you can say to yourself, “Well wait a minute. If Naomi’s praying like this, this seems to be the way I pray.”

Well think about it. God responds to Naomi’s prayer in a way that she doesn’t expect. What does she pray for? She prays for *chesed*, right? And what happens in 2:20?

Transcriber’s Note: Ruth 2:20, NKJV. “*Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!’ And Naomi said to her, ‘This man is a relation of ours, one of our closest relatives.’*”

Jeff: And we’re going to look at this. What happens in 2:20? Let me just say this. They seem to be despondent. They’re just sitting around. And Ruth says, “Look, Naomi.

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Let me go into the field and glean.” We’ll talk more about that. But Ruth seems to be the active party.

But Ruth goes and she gleans. She finds the field of Boaz. He loads her up with grain. I think she was a stout girl. You know what I mean? You think about the grain she had to lug home. I think she was like rr-rr-rr, right? (*Laughter*) She lugs this grain home. And what does her mother-in-law say? Her mother-in-law says, “God has shown us *chesed!*”

So God responds to Naomi’s prayer. But He does it in the context of the land, where covenant blessing was supposed to arise. That’s how He does it.

One of the things that I absolutely love about this whole story, when you think about it from this perspective, is this. Who has not prayed a broken prayer? (*Laughter*) Okay? I love it, how God takes this prayer of Naomi’s and says, “All right, honey! Let me answer this for you. And let me answer this for you in the way that you ought to have prayed it.” And He brings blessing, the blessing of *chesed* in the land of abundance. He brings her abundance of grain.

But sometimes God answers in spite of us, because look at what she does next. And again, we’ll look at this when we get there. But in chapter 3 she goes, “Has not God given us *chesed?*” And then she says this. “*Shall I not get you rest?*” It’s the same word that she prays in verse 8, the same word.

But look at what she’s done. She says, “God has given us *chesed! Shall I not get you rest?*” And the beautiful thing about it is that God does provide rest. But He does it in spite of Naomi, not because of her.

Again, it’s another example of Him taking this prayer. And we’re going to get into some really neat stuff as we get into Boaz here. But I’ll tell you what. I’ll give you a sneak preview. One of the things He does is this. Here’s Boaz. Boaz is a kinsman redeemer. But he’s not the closest kinsman redeemer. Boaz shows wisdom in that he waits. Waits for what? Waits for the other kinsman redeemer who is nearest to act.

But what happens to Naomi? Naomi forces the hand of Boaz by doing what she does in chapter 3. But even though it could have all come unraveled because of Naomi, God brings about success in their lives, brings about the promise of rest in spite of her and not because of her. It’s a beautiful way of thinking about the story as it unfolds and as Naomi’s prayers and God’s sovereignty interact. It’s just a wonderful thing.

So anyway, Proverbs. “*The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And I think that’s what we find when we find this story.

And then just a reminder, a reminder to all of us. I think it’s a reminder to us as we think about our life in union with Jesus Christ—Him being our *chesed*, Him being our rest, Him being our Husband. We need to pray the promises that we know God has given. Why? Because as we stand in Christ, every promise is Yes and Amen. So we’re out of our time. But do you have any last-minute questions or thoughts before we wrap it up with prayer?

Okay, let’s pray together. Father in heaven, thank You so much for this day and for the time You’ve given. Thank You, Lord, for this story of this wonderful woman and her

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daughter-in-law. We thank You for Your faithfulness which is so grand in this story. Lord, teach us through it. But not only teach us, Lord. Help us experience the same faithfulness of Yours day by day as we draw near to You. We pray these things in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause*)