

# The God of Emptiness

*Fall Revival 2009*

By Evangelist Brian McBride

sermonaudio.com

**Preached on:** Tuesday, September 15, 2009

## **Northern Kentucky Baptist Church**

2681 Turkeyfoot Road  
Lakeside Park, KY 41017

**Website:** [www.nkbc.org](http://www.nkbc.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/nkbc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/nkbc)

All right, the preacher said he's going to turn us loose on ya and sounds a little bit like the plague, I'm not sure. I have enjoyed being here this week. I've enjoyed all the music, I like these horns down here on the front row, and the choir has done a wonderful job and the musicians, and I like music and I think a Christian ought to have a song in their heart, amen? But you know, God really enjoys our singing. I was studying through the book of Exodus one day or for a while and studying through and trying to preach through it, and in chapter 15, I believe it is, when they crossed the Red Sea, the Bible says, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Remember, Moses sang and they sang. Then you go to the book of Jeremiah 2, it's hundreds of years later and God says, "I remember thee in the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after me in the wilderness," and he's talking about that song. He was still remembering that song that Israel sang to him. Then you get over into the book of Hosea and Israel's not singing anymore, they've backslid, they are worshiping false gods, and God says, "I will allure her and bring her into the valley of Achor and give her, or bring her into the wilderness and give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth when she went after me in the wilderness." He said, "I'm going to do everything I can to get my people to sing to me again." And I believe God enjoys our singing. I believe it's important how we sing to the Lord and I have appreciated all that's going on this week.

I'm a little disappointed because the preacher has introduced me every night and he has not yet said what the fellow said where I was two weeks ago, he announced me and he said I was cute. That's the first time anybody has ever said that about me, and so I've been waiting to hear it again because in the mouth of two witnesses every word will be established, but I'm losing hope. Amen. But I appreciate all the kind things people have done. Folks have been bringing things by, bringing us different things and we've enjoyed them, and I just want to thank you for what you've done for us.

I want to spend a few moments tonight in the book of Ruth 1, if you'll turn over there with me. Ruth 1 and we'll spend a few moments in this passage. I won't read the entire chapter but I will remind you of what's taking place up till this point.

I do have, I have a little of a ring up here, fellas, and I don't know if you could do something about that. I appreciate the sound men. That's better already right there. Thank you.

In the book of Ruth 1, there is a man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. I've been preaching out of the book of Ruth for several years, I've been trying to figure out how to pronounce that fellow's name. I called him Chillion, Chileon, and now I'm on Kileon, so maybe you can look and find out but anyway. And in the time of famine, Elimelech gathered his little family together and left Bethlehem Judah and went to the land of Moab. Bethlehem Judah means the house of bread and praise. Elimelech, his name means "my God is King." They left the house of bread and praise and went down to Moab and the word Moab means "who is God, or who is father," so they left the place where everybody knew who God was and went down and landed in a place where nobody was sure who God was. They went in a time of famine. They were backslid, they got out of the will of God. They went down, the Bible said, to sojourn, that means a short visit, they're not going to stay long. Anybody who ever gets out of the will of God never intends to stay there. They always say, "Well, I'll get back one of these days. I'll get straightened out." But it seems to be easier to leave many times than it is to come back, and so they spent 10 years down there and the Bible says Elimelech died, he died out of the will of God. Then his boys, Mahlon and Chilion, took them wives of the women of Moab. One of them married Orpah, and one of them married Ruth. You see, those boys, you need to keep this in mind, mom and dad, when you get out of the will of God, you may make it back, now Elimelech didn't, Naomi did, but the boys never intended to come back. They took them wives of Moab. They got settled down in the world and they decided to stay there and you might.

I remember some years ago going to the altar to try and help a man that was up there weeping and he wouldn't hardly speak and finally he looked at me and he said, "Too late. Too late. Too late." I said, "Too late for what?" He said, "Too late for my children." And what had happened he began to explain to me, he got out of the will of God when they were a young family and got out of church. Now he was an old man and a gray-headed man, and he was back in church and had got himself right with God but his children didn't want anything to do with God, and that's the way it was with these two boys. They decided they were going to stay in Moab.

Then the Bible says in Ruth 1 that those boys died. The Bible says that Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them. They died apparently together at the same time. I don't know, perhaps under the judgment of God. And so what you have left is you have three widows. You have Naomi, and you have her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, and it's really a sad story. It begins very sad. But the thing I like about the book of Ruth is it is a true life story with a happy ending. A lot of life stories don't end happily but Ruth, though she started bad, she ended well and I might say to you tonight, you may have started out poorly but that doesn't mean you have to end that way, you can end better than you started. It starts with a funeral but it ends with a family. It starts with loneliness but it ends with love. It starts with a burial but it ends with a birth. And on and on that you

could go that God worked in the life of this young woman, Ruth, and in Naomi's life and turned their lives around and I'm interested in that tonight.

Now what happens is these three widows are left and they're down in Moab and somebody comes by and tells them that God is blessing in Bethlehem and so they pick up and they start for Bethlehem. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, but along the way Orpah decides to go back. She's a picture of an apostate. An apostate. She has all the outward appearance of knowing God but she's empty on the inside. And her mother-in-law says to Ruth a little bit later, she'll say, "Thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people and unto her gods." And so Ruth and Naomi continue and they come to Bethlehem and I want to read about that a little bit in verse 19 of Ruth 1.

19 So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

We're in Ruth 1:20.

20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

I want you to notice the very first part of verse 21. Here is Naomi's testimony, "I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty." And I want to preach to you for just a few moments tonight on this thought: the God of emptiness. The God of emptiness. Now I would say this to you tonight and I would not want to argue with you about it but I believe it to be true, I do not think tonight that it was Naomi's idea to leave Bethlehem. The reason I don't believe that is because as soon as Elimelech was out-of-the-way and the boys were out of the way, what did Naomi do? She went back to Bethlehem. I take that to mean that it was not her idea. She followed her husband, she tried to do right in the sense of following her husband and yet she finds herself in a time of trouble, and I will remind you as I've already said earlier this week, that sometimes even when you do right you will find yourself in a time of trouble. And Naomi has a testimony here, she gives a testimony before her people and her testimony is, "I am empty. I went out full. I had something at one time but now I'm empty." I don't know, I think I have an idea what she means but I hear her words here, "I am empty," and I think to myself of people that I have known in the ministry throughout these past almost 30 years, and people that I dealt with who really have or would have if they'd be honest, they would have to give the same testimony that Naomi gives.

I wonder if you've ever felt like Naomi feels? I wonder if you've ever been in a place in your Christian life where you just felt like God had abandoned you? Where you just felt

like everything was empty, there wasn't anything left, and you just couldn't find God? I'm reminded, Isaiah said this, he said, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of his servant and walketh in darkness and hath no light?" Now that's an unusual statement. He said, "Are there some of you, you're obeying, you fear the Lord and you're obeying the voice of the man of God, and yet you find yourself in a dark place, you can't find God?" Have you ever been there? What do you do when you're in that place? What do you do when you've done the best you can and you just feel like God's left you and you just can't find God, what do you do? Well, Isaiah went on to say, "Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God." In other words, trust him even when you can't find him, even when you can't explain it.

Ruth comes back here and she says, "I'm empty." Here is her testimony, "I went out full and here's what the Lord's done to me, he's taken everything I have and he's left me empty." Now I'm interested in the three testimonies that we're going to find in this passage and I want to encourage you tonight on what to do when you get in a time of trouble and difficulty and you just can't find God and it just looks like nothing's going on, it looks like God's abandoned you and you're in the darkness and you just can't figure what to do, what are we going to do? I want us to think about it in this passage.

Now the first testimony that we see is this of Naomi and I want to think about it just a little more in detail and in depth. The Bible says in verse 19 that when Ruth and Naomi come to Bethlehem, the whole city is moved about them. When they come, they see Naomi, her name has meant "the pleasant one," and they look at her and they say, "Is this Naomi? This doesn't look like the Naomi that left 10 years ago. This doesn't look like the Naomi that we remember. There are worry lines in her face. There are other signs of trouble and difficulty. She doesn't look pleasant anymore." And so she said unto them, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara."

Now notice the first thing she says, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. He's dealt bitterly with me." Now that word "bitterly" is interesting word. It's the same word that the Bible used for how the Egyptians treated Israel when it said they made their lives bitter with hard bondage. And notice who it is that has dealt bitterly with her, she says "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Who is the Almighty? That title is interesting because the Almighty, that's the God of all power, that's the God that can do anything. Now you and I tonight, we could rejoice and say, "Hallelujah, our God has all power," unless we felt like Naomi did, that that God with all that power had turned all that power against us, and that's exactly the way she feels. She feels like God's treated her bitterly. Now what does she mean by that? Well, she's come back, she's destitute. When she left they had land, now they've come back and that land has not been worked. It may have been claimed by someone else and so she has nothing. She comes back with no way to live, no way to supply her needs. She comes back really literally as she said, she comes back empty.

She's a something else. Not only did she say "the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me," but then she says in verse 21, she said, "seeing the LORD hath testified against me." Now that's an interesting statement. God has been talking about Naomi is what she says. He's

been testifying against me. How did God, the Lord, testify against Naomi? Here's what I think, I think she's talking about Ruth. Now if we had read the entire first chapter of the book of Ruth, we would have found that when Naomi started home and Orpah went back, Naomi looked at Ruth and she said, "Go back with your sister-in-law." If you go back and read the first chapter, Naomi does her dead level best to talk Ruth out of coming back with her. It's not because she doesn't love Ruth, we know that she does, but she tries to talk her out of it. She said, "I don't have a son for you to marry. I don't have a husband." She said, "If I did have a husband and we had a son, you couldn't wait for him to be raised to marry." She said, "Go back and find rest in the house of your father." She tries to talk her out of coming. Why did she do that? I think partly because she had Ruth's interest in mind but I think also it could be partly because, do you know what Ruth is? Ruth is a testimony that Naomi and her family have been out of the will of God. Ruth is a Moabite. You're not supposed to marry, an Israelite was not supposed to marry a Moabite. The law said that a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the righteous unto the tenth generation.

So think about it, think about if you were in Naomi's shoes and you come back to Bethlehem, you're trying to get back in the will of God and along with you comes the leftovers of sin, along with you comes Ruth and somebody's going to say, "Who is this Moabite? Who is this Moabite girl with you? What's she doing with you?" And Naomi is going to have to say, "That's my daughter-in-law one of my sons married. Yeah, we were out of the will of God. My boys got out of the will of God. God killed them. They're dead." She's going to have to explain Ruth. Ruth is the testimony that Naomi's family has been out of the will of God.

Then I want you to see the third thing that she says in her testimony. She finishes in verse 21 by saying, "and the Almighty hath afflicted me." I think I've already mentioned that this week, that that word "affliction" was important in the ear of a Jew and the mind of a Jew, he believed that if a woman's husband died, that was the affliction of God. And so she's saying, somebody might be, I can see them gathered around, you know, they've gathered around, here's Naomi, she's trying to explain Ruth and somebody says, "Where's Elimelech? Where's Elimelech? Where's your husband?" And Naomi is going to have to say, "He's dead." And what she's saying when she says he's dead, what they're hearing is, "God has judged you. The Almighty hath afflicted you, that's why your husband is dead."

Now I want you to think about it, here is her testimony, her testimony is, "I have nothing but the leftovers of my sin and God has taken my husband and my children." And her testimony is, "I'm empty." You know, we sometimes have testimony services in the church, you probably have them here. When the preacher gets up and says, "Has anybody got a testimony?" He's not looking for one like Naomi's. He's not looking for somebody to stand up and say, "I'm telling you, my life is empty right now. I can't find God and it seems like God has turned against me and I don't know what to do." He's not looking for that, but the truth is sometimes that's the way we feel. Sometimes that's where we think we are.

But I want you to notice the second testimony in this passage. I call this first testimony the testimony of a wandering saint. It's not a very pleasant testimony, but there's another testimony, it's in the very next verse and it is the testimony of the Holy Ghost, and I call it the testimony of a working Savior. It's almost as though in verse 22 after Naomi has spoken and given her assessment of the situation, it's almost as though the Holy Ghost raises his hand and says, "Could I give a testimony? We've heard what Naomi thinks about what's going on, could I give a testimony? Could I tell you what I see that's going on here? Could I tell you what it looks like from God's side of the picture?" I want you to notice that the Bible, the Holy Spirit will give us three really three testimonies here and really he will address every grievance that Naomi has brought up.

He addresses the last one first. He says in the first three verses, or excuse me, three words of verse 22, he says, "So Naomi returned." Now remember Naomi's last grievance, the last part of her testimony was, "I've been afflicted. The Almighty has afflicted me." What she's saying is, "He's taken my husband." Now pay close attention: the Holy Ghost says, "Yep, your husband's gone. Yep, your sons are gone. Yep, you had to go down and follow those three coffins down to the graveyard. Yes, your heart was broken. Yes, you've been bereaved. Yes, you've been widowed. Yes, you have no children. But Naomi, you're not in Moab anymore, you are back in Bethlehem." So Naomi returned. "Yes, you've had to face sorrow. Yes, you've had to go through grief but you are no longer out of the place of blessing, that grief that you experience has left you free to come back to the house of God and get in the will of God." And I'll tell you what this teaches us and I'm not talking necessarily about husbands or about children, I'm talking about circumstances in life, you understand that, it teaches us that a lot of times the very thing that we think we can't live without, that's the very thing that is keeping us out of the will of God. That thing that we are clutching to and holding on, and again, I'm not talking about spouses or children, I'm talking about circumstances, many times possessions, sometimes it's a vocation, sometimes it's a possession, sometimes it's some relationship and we just think we can't get along without it. If God were to put his hand on it and take it away, we'd think he was being harsh with us and the truth is it is the very thing that's keeping us out of the will of God. Sometimes there are things we think we need that we'd be better off without.

I was preaching down in Florida and I got done preaching and I went to the back to shake hands, and there was a young man there and I did not know this at that time but I found out later that he had been through four years of Bible college, he had been called to preach as a young man, gone off to Bible college, graduated, came home, got married, had five little children, and he said this to me, I shook his hand, he looked at me, he didn't greet me, he didn't smile, he shook my hand and he said, "All right for you, preacher, all right for you to say quit your job and go to preaching. All right for you to say that." Well, I thought a minute about my message. I never said quit your job and get busy preaching, but apparently somebody said that to him while I was preaching and I think I know who it was, I think it was a Holy Spirit. And he said, "All right for you." He said, "I've got five little children, I drive a semi truck three days a week and I make \$50,000 a year." He said, "If I quit my job and go pastor a church," he said, "I'll probably only make \$25,000 a year." I hated to tell him if he quit his job and went to pastor the church, it would

probably be a long time before he made \$25,000 a year. But here's what he was saying, he said, "I've got to have my job. I can't live without my job." And the truth of the matter is that job was keeping him out of the will of God and he thought his family needed that job, and the truth of the matter is the best thing that could have happened to him if he's really called to preach, is for him to lose that job and get busy preaching. That would be the best thing for his family but, you see, sometimes we think we have to have things that we really don't need. They're in the way. The principle is here.

So the Holy Ghost addresses that grievance and says, "You're back." Then he addresses her second grievance. Remember what the middle one was? "The LORD hath testified against me." She's talking about Ruth, Ruth coming back with her, having to explain her, but look what the Bible says. The Holy Ghost makes reference to that, "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab." Now I want you to think about this. This is chapter 1, there are four chapters in the book of Ruth, right? In chapter 1, Naomi is explaining Ruth but what is Naomi doing in chapter 4? She's sitting out on the porch in a rocking chair, well, maybe she didn't have a rocking chair but I'd like to think she did. If you have a porch, you ought to have a rocking chair, amen? She's sitting outside and Ruth has married Boaz, the mighty man of wealth, and they've had a son, remember, and his name is Obed, and do you know what Naomi is doing in chapter 4? She's rocking that little baby in her arms and the women are gathered around her and they're singing a song, and do you know what the song says? They're saying, "A son is born unto Naomi." Not unto Ruth, unto Naomi. And they say, "He'll be a nourisher and a restorer and he is a blessing to you." So all of a sudden we've gone from chapter 1 to chapter 4, in chapter 1 Naomi doesn't want to have to explain Ruth and tries to get Ruth to come back, but I wonder what she felt in chapter 4 when she's rocking that little grandbaby in her arms? I wonder what she felt then when the women are around her? All of a sudden I think maybe she was glad that Ruth came back with her and what God – now listen to this, and don't miss this, here's what God did – God took the leftovers of that family being out of the will of God and when Naomi got right and came back to Bethlehem, God took the leftovers of their sin and turned it around and made it the greatest blessing that she'd ever known in her life. Now I'm going to tell you, I like a God like that. I like a God who when I will get right and own up and try and get back in the place of blessing can even take my failures and somehow bring glory and joy out of them. I like a God like that, don't you? I'm glad that's the God we serve and do you know what it shows me? It shows me two things, it shows me, number one, what we've already seen that sometimes what we think we need we really don't need, but it shows me this, that sometimes the things that we have in our lives that we really wish we didn't have are the things that God will use to bless us.

Has there ever been something in your life that you just thought to yourself, "You know, I could do without this. I could have got along just fine without this burden and without this going on in my life." I can imagine Naomi, although I'm sure she loved Ruth and it's obvious that she did, she tried to talk her out, and I can just imagine her thinking, "You know, I'm trying to go home and get right with God, I could do without having to explain Ruth." But when we get to chapter 4, I'm sure she said, "I'm so glad Ruth came back with me." You know how it is. I'm not a grandparent, I hear how wonderful it is to be a

grandparent, I heard Dr. Keene say to a lady one day who was having trouble with her little baby trying to get it in the car seat, we were in the automobile and we drove by and she was struggling, obviously frustrated with that, she had a toddler and a little baby, and Dr. Keene pulled up and rolled down the window and said to her, "Hey," and she looked over and he said, "Let me remind you that grandchildren are God's reward for not strangling your own." I saw a lady one day with a sweatshirt that said "Grandma's my name and spoiling's my game." When I was down in North Carolina and Brother Randy Martin said, "I can tell my wife is a grandmother because it used to be when she saw a child doing a certain thing, she'd get a switch, now she gets a camera."

Now think about Naomi. It seemed like she was at an end and it seemed like it would be better if Ruth would stay home and she just go back and get right with God and just live out the rest of her life and die, but God used what she did not want with her to become a blessing in her life. Don't get angry with God because he inserts some things into your life that you just wish he hadn't done, you just wish he hadn't put them there because God has a way of turning those things into blessings.

Then do you remember the first of her grievances? She says in verse 21 that "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me," and then she explains that and she says, "I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty," and her first grievance, the Holy Ghost addresses it last. Look what he says in the last part of verse 22, "So they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." Now barley harvest is a wonderful time of year and it's the first harvest of the year, and what's interesting about it is that there is a law in place called, and I'm sure you're familiar with it, the law of the gleaner, and the law of the gleaner said that if you had a field in Israel, when you harvested the field you were to leave the corners unharvested. What for? So that four classes of people, the poor, the widow, the stranger and the fatherless, could go into the corners of your field and reap where they had not sown and they wouldn't starve to death. Now do you know what? Ruth qualifies in all four of those categories. She's poor. She's a widow. She's a stranger. And for all practical purposes, she's fatherless because if her daddy is alive, he's way back yonder in Moab and can't help her. So she qualifies in all those categories. I will say this about that law of the gleaner, the Bible never said how big the corners were to be. It never said, "Now if you have a field and it's such and such a size, you have to leave this much." It didn't say that, it just said, "Leave the corners," and I believe the reason was God told us, he told them what to do and how they could be generous, and then he left it up to them how generous they wanted to be. If you really wanted to be a blessing to people, you could carve you out a little circle in the middle and leave all the rest of it.

But here's what happens, think about this now, this law established, if I remember right in the book of Leviticus I think it's mentioned the first time, this law of the gleaner was established long before Ruth was ever born, long before Naomi was ever born, and so what we find here is before they ever had a need, God already had the supply for them. You say, "Well, I just don't know how I'm going to make it." You've been discounting God again, haven't you? You forgot God. He knows the beginning from the ending. He knows you have a need before the need comes up and he said, "Before they even ask, I

will answer." And that's what he did for them. You say, "Well, I just don't know how I'm going to make it." God's got a field for you. He's got gleanings for you.

You know, another interesting thing about if I've studied it outright about this barley harvest, they would go out and they would take a sheaf of the barley and they would wave it before the Lord. It had to do with the firstfruits of the harvest of that year. And I was reading what one fellow said about it, he said when they waved that harvest, that sheaf, they were saying that they were thanking God for the harvest, they were giving him a blessing and a thank you for what he'd done, and they were saying there's more in the field to come and that which is in the field is just like this. And so later on in the New Testament, Paul comes along and he calls Jesus the firstfruits of them which slept. He's a picture of that wave offering, that firstfruits, and I thought about that, when he rose from the dead, there's more in the grave that are gonna come, amen, and when they come they're gonna be just like him. So this time that they come back is not only a time when there are gleanings, but it's a time when unbeknownst to the Israelites, they're celebrating resurrection, and new beginning, a fresh start. That's what resurrection is. That's a good time to come back and get right with God, isn't it? Do you just see how God had all this worked out, how he's working behind the scenes and had it all prepared? If they'd of come back some other time, they would have starved to death but God had it all prepared. I would want to encourage you tonight, you say, "Preacher, things seem empty. Things aren't going the way I thought they would go." Just hang on, it may be chapter 1 but chapter 4 is on the way. Just stay with God.

Now there's one last testimony that I think we need to look at before we're done. There's the testimony of the wandering saint and the testimony of the working Savior, but there is another testimony that really a lot of what we've already looked at hinges on this third testimony. I call it the testimony of a witnessing stranger and I want you to go back and look in verse 6 of chapter 1. Look what it says. "Then she arose," talking about Naomi, "Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab," now listen to this, "for she had heard," do you see that, "for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread."

Now I don't know because the Bible doesn't say, I don't know who told her this but if she heard it, somebody had to tell it, right? I picture it like this in my mind and this may not, I'm just picturing it, I'm just thinking it, I'm imagining, I'm pondering. Someone comes through and he has to pass through Moab to get back to Bethlehem, maybe he's a businessman. He goes into an inn and he's gonna maybe get a little rest or maybe find a place to sleep, I don't know, and he says to one of the fellows, "I'm from Bethlehem. I'm heading back there." And somebody might say, "You know, down the road there's a lady who came from Bethlehem about 10 years ago and she's had a hard life. Her husband died, her sons died and now she's down there in her little cottage with her two daughters-in-law who just buried those boys. She's just had it rough. She's from Bethlehem. Yep, came here about 10 years ago. Just lives down the road, just down the road." So he goes down there and come to that little cottage where they're staying and knocks on the door, and here comes Naomi and opens the door and she's dressed in her black from the funeral and her daughters-in-law are in the back and they're weeping. He says, "Are you Naomi?"

"Yeah, that's me." "You're from Bethlehem?" "Yes, sir. That was a long time ago." "Why did you ever leave?" "Well, there was a famine and my husband thought it best that we come down here." He might look at her and say, "Do you know what? There's no famine down there now. Boy, God's been blessing us these past few years. Every year we've had wonderful harvests and our wonderful God," I like that, "has visited them." Did you see where it said that? Doesn't it do something for your heart to think about God visiting us, coming by? It's like chapter 18 of Genesis when Abraham's in the tent door and God comes by and fellowships with him. Man, I like the thought of that, don't you? So he says, "God's been visiting with us and he's been blessing us and it's just wonderful back in Bethlehem." Then he'd leave her. She'd turn around and look at those two girls and say, "You know, if it's that good, I think I'll go back." Now he didn't promise her anything but she heard. She heard.

Now think about how wonderful this testimony is. I thought of four things that he said to her. He said, "The Lord," he said, "The Lord," it's not just anybody, it's not Baal and it's not Molech and it's not the god of Moab but it's the Lord, the real God. I call him the God of preeminent glory. He is Lord in Israel and he's still Lord down in Moab whether they know it or not. And then he said, "The Lord had visited his people, that he is a God of persistent grace." These are the people that had turned their back on him, that's why they had the famine but he didn't turn his back on them, he came to visit them anyway. And then is the God of precious gifts, he's giving them bread. When God comes by, he brings a gifts. And then he's a God of a peculiar group, he said he has visited his people. Now think about what he said, he said to Naomi, "You remember the preeminent Lord, the real God? He's got a group he calls his and he visits them, and when he visits them, he brings a gift." And when he got done telling her that, she said, "I'm going home."

You say, "Preacher, why is that testimony so important?" Because if Naomi had never heard that testimony, she might never have left Moab and then we never would have seen all the things we've seen in this book. "Well, what does it have to do with me?" Here's what it has to do with you: you and I sometimes we feel like that wandering saint and we feel like Naomi did, but here's what we need to be all the time, we need to be that witnessing stranger. We need to be that one that goes by and says to somebody, "You know, the Lord is good. Boy, he's been good to me. I'll tell you, the Lord has never let me down." I'll tell you, it would be good if we had some witnessing strangers on Sunday afternoon down at the restaurant who when the waitress came by instead of sitting and talking about how long the preaching was, how loud the music was, how much the offering needed to be, somebody would sit and say while that waitress is around and others are around, somebody should say, "Man, didn't we have a time at church today? Man, I'm telling you the preacher preached the word of God and the singers sang about Jesus, and God met with us, and God helped us." You know, there might be a Naomi standing around. There might be a Naomi or a Ruth standing around listening, some Naomi out of the will of God, some Ruth who's never known God, and you're sitting there and you say, "Boy, I'm telling you, our preacher today, he opened up that Bible and, man, did he help us. I'm so glad I went to church. I'm so glad I made it to Sunday school. I'm so glad I was there at Wednesday night. I get help down at the house of God. We've got the best group of people and God just blesses us." Do you know what might happen?

There might be some Naomi sitting around and saying, "I believe I'll go down there." There might be some Ruth sitting around saying, "I believe I'll go down there." If we walk around and tell people how good it is to serve God when we're on the job, when we're in the grocery store, when whatever we're doing, when we're with relatives, if we just tell and tell people, "Man, I'm telling you, I go down to church there because God blesses us and God helps us. It helps my family. It helps my spiritual life. It encourages us. God is so good to us." We might just get somebody else thirsty to come home. We need some witnessing strangers. Do you know what I want to be? I want to be that witnessing stranger. I want to be the one who whether I ever know whether they showed up or not, I don't know whoever told her this ever knew that she went back or not, but I don't think that's why he told her. I think he told it because he's glad for what God had done in his life.

Let me ask you this question: who have you told lately about how good God is? About how much he's done for you? About how wonderful it is to go down to the house of God? Who have you told lately? You say, "Well, preacher, I'll tell you the truth, I'm right where Naomi was. I'm kind of empty." Well, did you know that God will accept praise on credit? Did you know that? He won't turn you down if you want to praise him even when you don't feel like it. He won't turn you down if you want to praise him even when you're having trouble. In fact, you might as well just go ahead and praise him, it's only chapter 1, you're gonna want to in chapter 4 anyway. So just go ahead and tell somebody how good he is. You say, "Well, I don't know what he's up to." Tell them how good he is anyway. Tell them how good he was to you a while ago and how good you figure he's going to be to you again in a little while. Tell them I don't know exactly what is up to but I know he always does right. Just tell somebody. Who have you told lately? Somebody said, "I love the book of Ruth. I love what happens. I love how Elimelech, I mean how Boaz marries Ruth. I love how Ruth gets into the lineage of Christ in Matthew 1. I love all that goes on there." Well, it hinges on somebody telling how good God is. Let's go out and tell somebody. Let's purpose in our heart we're going to be the witnessing stranger, tell somebody how good the Lord is so some Naomi will come home, some Ruth will get in the lineage of the Lord Jesus, shall get in the family. It would be wonderful. You could be that witnessing stranger and if you're where Naomi was, just hang on. Praise him anyway. Chapter 4 will be coming pretty soon.

I want you to bow your heads, please. Your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed. I don't know if you can tell it but I've been trying to encourage you tonight and I hope you've been encouraged. I hope you've been encouraged if you're struggling and going through a difficult time and a hard time, that things aren't always exactly the way we think they are. Naomi had her viewpoint, God gave his viewpoint. If Naomi could have just looked ahead by faith to chapter 4, she never would have said, "I'm empty." She would have just said, "Well, I was just waiting for God to do what he was going to do." Why don't you tonight, why don't you practice a little bit telling God how wonderful he is? You say, "Preacher, I can't see it tonight." Well, you might be in the place Naomi is but tell him by faith, then after you tell him, go out and tell somebody else how good he is, how precious he is, how wonderful he is. You see, he's still God even you feel empty. The truth of the matter is if Naomi could have seen right, she would've said, "I went out

empty and I came home full." That's what she would have said. "I was empty when I left and now I'm full now that I'm back." And it might be tonight that you got out of the will of God. I want you to come back. You're not where you once were. You went through a difficult time and you headed down to Moab. You could come home. Naomi did. And God can make things right if you will come home.

Would you do this for me? Our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, is there a Christian here tonight, you know you're saved, you know if you died you'd go to heaven, but you would say to me tonight, "Preacher, when I came in these doors tonight, I felt just like Naomi feels. When I came in honestly I felt empty. That's the way I felt." Some folks are raising their hands, that's the way you felt. Why don't you do this tonight, why don't you come and tell God how wonderful he is? Why don't you just come to him and say to him, "Lord, I felt empty, I felt like you had abandoned me. I remember you've been good to me and I remember your promises, and though I can't see it tonight, I want to praise you by faith. I want to tell you that if you'll help me, I'll trust you and I'll not only praise you, I'll tell somebody else." Why don't you do what Naomi did, nobody promised her anything but she got up and came home. Why don't you come home tonight? That's the start, just get up from where you are and get on your knees at the altar and just come home. That's how you start. That's how Naomi started and God helped her. Why don't you do that tonight? Folks are coming. You don't have to wait. You can come right now and God's dealing with your heart. That's how you start.

Maybe tonight you've been a little timid about being that witnessing stranger and you ought to come and say, "Lord, help me to open my mouth and tell people how good you are. I want to make a difference in somebody's life. I want somebody to come home because of my testimony." If we just had some witnessing strangers who would just talk about how wonderful God is, what a difference we'd make in people's lives.

I'm going to ask you one more question, I wonder if there's somebody here tonight and you're not saved, you don't know the Lord, you don't know if you died you'd go to heaven. You say, "Preacher, I'm not saved but I sure would like to be. I'd like to know God and I wish you'd pray for me." If you'd just lift your hand out and let me see it. Is there anybody like that tonight? "I'm not saved but I sure would like to be."

*Now Father, help us in these next few moments. Thank you for speaking to hearts. Thank you for touching lives. Thank you for being such a wonderful God. And Lord, all of us sometimes seem like in our life we get to that place where we feel empty and I pray tonight somebody will leave full because they have praised you and thanked you and they look forward to what you're going to do, trusted you when they couldn't tell what you were up to, they trusted in the name of the Lord and they stayed upon the God. Help us now. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*