

Let No Root of Bitterness Spring Up

Part 1: Naomi & Job

I. Introduction: Bitterness will destroy us and defile many

a. Read **Hebrews 12:14-15**

- i. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness without which no one can see the Lord
- ii. Looking carefully lest (see to it that no one)
 1. we fall short of God's grace/favor
 2. **any root of bitterness springing up to cause trouble and defile many** ("Or see to it, that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble....")
 3. there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau
- iii. Hebrew writer is writing to the Christians who are suffering persecution – calling them to hold on, persevere, not fall away or turn away from God.

b. Bitterness is a serious sin. Challenging one too: returns when we think we thought we had addressed it. "I thought I dealt with that."

c. We can become bitter about many things:

- i. Tragedies in life, sickness
- ii. Injustice done to us, our children, those we love
- iii. How we are treated at work, neighbors, even friends
- iv. We can be bitter from things from long ago, today, or in the future

d. Signs of bitterness (for me)

- i. Angry, resentful when you think of something that happened or of a person.
- ii. Regular "venting" about something that happened to you.
- iii. Lack of peace regarding a situation or toward a person.

e. Hebrew writer writes about "the root of bitterness"

- i. Bitter root – poisonous?
- ii. Weeds that choke out fruit, or flowers.

- iii. Only one way to get rid of a root, chop it up/pull it out!
- iv. **My Goal:**
 - 1. Equip us to deal with any bitterness in our hearts, or prepare you to deal with the bitter roots that Satan will try to plant in the future.
 - 2. Look at 5 examples of people who should have been bitter, but either were not or overcame their bitterness.
 - 3. May they inspire us to deal with the temptations of bitterness that come our way.
 - 4. 3-Part Lesson
 - a. Part 1: Naomi and Job (Bitterness toward God)
 - b. Part 2: David (Bitterness from injustice and sin)
 - c. Part 3: Lessons from the life of Paul and Jesus

II. Naomi's Example (Tragedy/Death)

- a. Read **Ruth 1:1-22**
- b. Summary
 - i. Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons from Bethlehem, journey to Moab due to famine.
 - ii. Elimelech dies. Two sons marry. Both sons die.
 - iii. Naomi left with two Moabite daughters-in-law.
 - iv. She learns that God is providing for His people and returns to the land of Judah with her daughters-in-law.
 - v. On the way, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their mother's house. Orpah does this. Ruth says she will follow Naomi, that Naomi's people will be her people, Naomi's God, her God.
 - vi. They return to Bethlehem. The whole city shouts (in joy!).
 - vii. Don't call me Naomi ("Pleasantness") but call me Bitter.
- c. Naomi had every right to be bitter! (seems to me).
 - i. Just imagine, your spouse dies and your children. You are left in a foreign land with strangers and in-laws.

- d. But, was Naomi bitter? Are these indications / signs that she is bitter toward God?
- i. She hears the Lord is “watching over His people by giving them bread” **(Ruth 1:6)**
 - ii. Naomi returns to God’s people and land.
 - iii. “May the Lord have mercy on you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.” **Ruth 1:9-10**
 - iv. She selflessly tells them to look after their own interests and find husbands from their own people.
 1. (Might be difficult in find husbands in Israel given **Deuteronomy 7** – do not give your children in marriage to the nations around you, who will turn you away from Me to serve other Gods)
 - v. “Do not call me Naomi; call me Bitter, for **the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me**. I went out full and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since **the Lord has humbled me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?**” **(Ruth 1:20-21)**
 1. Dealt very bitterly with me
 2. Humbled me, Afflicted me
 3. “the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me...” **(Ruth 1:21, ESV)**
 4. (God’s treatment of her, not her feelings toward God)
 - vi. I don’t think she was bitter!
 1. Reminds me of **Hebrews 12:3-11**, quoting **Proverbs 3**: “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”
 2. How do we feel about God chastening us? Scourging us? (Through tragedy, difficulties, etc.)
 3. Yet, God promises to scourge His children for their good.
 - vii. Naomi is a tremendous example of trusting in God, not losing her faith during a very difficult time. Let’s consider what God accomplishes through this tragedy. (I will summarize.)

- e. Ruth goes out into the field working from morning to night. Catches Boaz' attention, he hears of her faithfulness, sees her hard work, puts his protection around her.
 - i. ""it has been fully reported to me, all that you have done with your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people who you did not know yesterday or the day before. May the Lord repay your work and may a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." **(Ruth 2:11-12)**
- f. Ruth returns and reports to Naomi. Naomi's response: "Blessed is 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 close relatives."
- g. Wonderful plan: Naomi sends Ruth to Boaz' place of sleep, lays at his feet, pure, bold, humble (to an older man, not chasing the younger ones)
- h. Boaz redeems Elimelech's field and and takes Ruth as well.
- i. Incredible ending: read **Ruth 4:13-22**.
 - i. Ruth married to this righteous man.
 - ii. Child born, Naomi with the grandson at her bosom. In a home, provided for by her righteous daughter-in-law and righteous son.
 - iii. Child is Obed. Little did she know that he would be the father of Jesse, father of King David, from whom would come the Christ, from Bethlehem.
- j. What do I learn from this story?
 - i. Naomi was faithful to her God. Through affliction, scourging. Never let go that God was faithful and kind.
 - ii. She did not deny the humbling. This was tough.
 - iii. She was selfless, caring more about her daughters-in-law than herself.
 - iv. This story is about 3 righteous people (Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz) whose righteous lives brought about a miraculous story.
 - v. What if Naomi had become bitter? Given up? Given in to selfishness? Tried to push her own agenda?
 - vi. Beautiful and instructive picture of a woman who waited on God, but also actively engaged in the story He was unfolding for her.

- vii. And I do not think she gave in to bitterness, even with the death of her husband and two children.
- viii. May we never turn away from God in the face of death or tragedy!

III. Job's Example (Tragedy/Sickness)

- a. Another who lost all who were close to Him and did not sin. Read **Job 1:1-3, 6-22, 2:1-15**.
- b. Summary
 - i. Job is a righteous man.
 - ii. Satan appears before God and God offers Job to Satan.
 - iii. Satan says of course Job worships you, you have protected and blessed Him. Let me at him. God says go for it, just don't touch him.
 - iv. Satan allowed to kill all Job has: servants, sons and daughters and takes his oxen, donkeys and camels (wealth).
 - v. "In all these things that happened, Job did not sin against the Lord or charge God with folly."
 - vi. Then, Satan allowed to go after Job's health.
 - vii. Malignant sores from head to foot.
 - viii. Job accepts good and bad from the Lord. Does not sin against God. (tremendous example for us)
- c. Here we see Satan's active role in bringing about evil. God permits Satan to do this, "the 3rd actor in the story".
 - i. Easy to blame God. It's His fault. We become bitter toward God and others.
 - ii. Yet, it is the Evil One who is doing this evil. The murderer, liar, and destroyer. God is allowing it. Satan is active in Job's life. Active in ours as well.
 - 1. **Question:** Do we have a problem that God allows Satan to bring evil and suffering into our lives? (Do we see this as unfair, unjust, and become bitter?)
 - a. **Question:** Why does God do this?
 - b. Job could not understand why this was happening to him. He had lived a righteous life. (**Job 31**) Job is struggling!

2. God's thundering response. Read **Job 38:1-18**.
 - a. God alone knows all things. His ways are perfect. Who will question Him?
3. Job's response:
 - a. "But what answer will I give to these things? I will put my hand over my mouth, I have spoken once, I will not do so a second time." (**Job 40:4-5**)
 - b. Read **Job 42:2-6**
 - i. God's acts are "too great and wonderful, which I do not know"
- d. Easy to become bitter regarding difficult health issues. Why does God allow this to happen to some, while others are healthy and strong? Why to me? What have I done?
 - i. Me: chronic fatigue.
 1. I'll put up with this for 6 months (diet, denying activities, financial hit, burden on my family)
 2. I was bitter, angry toward God.
 3. Sometimes, later on, we can see some of the purposes God may have intended:
 - a. I was involved in a lot of useless activity.
 - b. Took me out of my routine/spiritual rut, started re-evaluating what was most important.
 - c. Dug deeper into the Scriptures, deeper understanding of God's Word, and put me on a different track and in a different spiritual direction.
 - d. Eva grew tremendously.
 - e. Family did well spiritually
 - f. Learned that I did not have to "do" to please God.
 - g. Learned that pleasing Him was more important than pleasing people.
 - h. Learned that I did not have to solve everyone's problems, that my anxiety, stress was much of my own doing.

- i. I am so grateful for this time.
4. But some people do not get better. Some people get sicker and sicker. They die. Sometimes God's purposes are not so clear.
 - a. Story of couple whose husband gets dementia. Set up nice retirement life, then he starts beating her on a camping trip. Life would never be the same. The man she knew was not him anymore.
 - i. How would I handle this?
 - ii. What if Eva got dementia? How would I respond?
 - iii. Bitter? Lash out at God? Not what I planned?
 - iv. Some of us may get really sick. It's likely. How will we respond?
 - ii. *What might help us not to become discouraged, bitter, to turn away from God?*
 1. Our days are numbered, we will all die a physical death.
 2. God gives us the answer (we can be resurrected, especially encouraging when struggling with physical or emotional health: a new body!)
 3. The work of the Evil One – destroyer is at work. God, in His perfect wisdom, set it up this way. We must trust that He knows what is best.
 - a. We must have the heart of Job – I will cover my mouth and speak no more.
 4. God can be glorified through it.
- e. Paul dealt with “a thorn in his side”.
 - i. Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**
 1. Again, we see Satan at work, trying to hurt, destroy, embitter: to separate us from God.
 2. But Paul recognized this as God humbling Him, and that He would work through Paul's weakness.
 3. The very thing Satan was trying to use to discourage/destroy, God used to demonstrate His power, strength, and glory.
- f. Next lesson: David's example – dealing with injustice and his own sin.