

I. The Trade That Cost Everything

- A. The rich aroma of venison stew filled the air as Esau staggered into camp, exhausted from his hunt. He'd struck out. He was empty handed. His stomach growled.
- B. "Give me some of that stew," he said to his brother Jacob. "I'm starving."
- C. Jacob looked up from the cast iron pot bubbling over the fire. His eyes were cunning. He eyed his brother, calculating. "No," he said. "I didn't make it for you."
- D. "No?" Esau said. "Come on, bro, just a little. I'm starving."
- E. "No. I don't want to. Go make your own dinner."
- F. Even though they were twins, Esau towered over Jacob. Esau was built like bull; Jacob was scrawny and weak. He could have pinched Jacob's head off his skinny little neck.
- G. Esau humored him. "Name your price."
- H. Jacob eyes gleamed. He fought to suppress a smile. "Anything?"
- I. Esau almost laughed. "Sure, the way I feel now... anything."
- J. Jacob began ladling the hardy stew into a giant bowl, almost a bucket. The aroma was amazing. He saw Esau lick his lips. Jacob's mind was racing. "Okay," he said. "I'll trade you... I'll give you all this stew... I'll give you all of it. You give me... *your birthright*."
- K. His birthright! This was Esau's exalted position. His legal rights as the firstborn son. His birthright meant a double inheritance. It meant a special blessing. It meant honor and privileges. It meant a special place in God's covenant promises.
- L. All that for one meal?
- M. Esau licked his lips. Weighed his options. "Look, I'm dying of hunger," he said. "What good is a birthright to me if I'm dead?"
- N. He reached out his hands, Jacob handed him the stew, and with that, a man traded his sacred dignity for a fleeting pleasure that would satisfy for minutes and disappear forever. [Based on Genesis 25:29-34.]
  1. *"Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God... lest there be any... profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."* (Hebrews 12:15-16)
- O. Scripture calls Esau "profane" for this—the word means someone who couldn't see his own sacred value. Someone who couldn't see his own worth, his own preciousness to God.
- P. I'm calling my talk today:

1. **Falling Short of the Grace of God.**

II. Ruth

- A. We are continuing our journey through the Book of Ruth, and today is part 4.
- B. I believe what we'll discover could set many of you free from bondage you might not even realize you're in.
- C. Our theme for the year is "Resting in the Love of God," and we're using Ruth as our case study. Last time, we saw that rest is impossible in our own strength because we live in a fallen world and are members of a fallen race. The whole universe is in a state of endless labor, and nothing we do can reverse the fall.
- D. But we also discovered a magnificent truth: God's commitment to you matters infinitely more than your commitment to Him. Grace means God's initiative comes first, and His faithfulness never wavers, even when yours does.
- E. Today, we're going to explore what happens when grace is standing right in front of you, but you can't even see it, or you trade it away for something that just doesn't matter.
  1. What causes a person to "snub" the very grace you so desperately need? Let's find out.

III. The Return to Bethlehem

- A. Last time we saw Naomi and Ruth begin a long journey to Bethlehem. Ruth, the daughter-in-law, made a self-sacrificial commitment to Naomi, the mother-in-law, a woman who had nothing to offer her and didn't even want her.
- B. Ruth said, "I'm going to make a commitment to you!"
- C. Naomi said, "I don't want a commitment from you. Did I ask for a commitment from you? Leave me alone!"
- D. Ruth said, "Too bad, you're stuck with me."
- E. Let's see what happens next in Ruth 1:19-22:

IV. *"Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'"* (Ruth 1:19)

- A. The city buzzes with excitement. But the tone isn't necessarily welcoming.
- B. The women of town give Naomi a reception that's more curiosity than compassion. They ask, "So this is My Pleasant One, is it?" This is feminine trash talk.
- C. It's actually a hostile question based on the meaning of Naomi's name. Naomi means "My Pleasant One."
- D. Though her name connotes grace and favor, Naomi's appearance radiates the misery that's in her soul. Sensing this, the women swoop in for the kill. "So this is My Pleasant One, hahahahaha?"
- E. She's lost her home, her husband, her two sons, and now, like vultures, her own hometown is pecking at her soul.
- F. How much suffering can one person take?

V. *"But she said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, 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 testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?'"* (Ruth 1:20-21)

- A. "Call me Mara," says Naomi. This is the Hebrew word for bitterness or misery. Call me BITTERNESS. Call me MISERY. Call me HEARTACHE.
- B. And just where does her misery come from? She says it comes from God.
- C. Naomi uses a particular Hebrew name for God two times. The name is SHADDAI. It is translated Almighty.
  1. v. 20: the Almighty (Shaddai) has dealt very bitterly with me.

2. v. 21: the Almighty (Shaddai) has afflicted, literally done evil, against me.
  - D. There is some debate on the meaning of Shaddai, but the root meaning seems to be "He is sufficient."
  - E. When I visited Italy, I stayed with friends in their home. But there was so much food, I couldn't eat it all. And then our wonderful hostess would keep pressing us to eat more, till I had to say "Basta!" "Basta" means Enough. I'm full. I can't eat any more.
  - F. Naomi calls God the All-Sufficient One, but she doesn't yet experience him as the All-Sufficient One. The point of this name is that God has the kind of grace that feeds you till you are stuffed and then offers you more, until you have to push back from the table, loosen your belt, slap your belly, and say "Basta."
  - G. So what's the disconnect? Why can't Naomi experience this "Basta" kind of grace?
  - H. What happened to her faith? Where did it go? And we should probably ask the question, what exactly is faith anyway?
  - I. Let's pause here to consider three powerful qualities of God's grace that are right here staring Naomi in the face, but she simply can't see it.
- VI. Three Qualities of Grace
- A. **UNSOUGHT GRACE: Grace pursues you before you seek it.**
    1. Grace always takes the initiative. God is committed to you long before you will ever be committed to him. There's nothing you can do to trigger God's grace—his own heart took care of that long before the world began.
      - a) **"We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)**
    2. Whatever preliminaries need to be met for you to experience God's grace in your life, you've already met them just by being you, and one way or another, like it or not, feel it or not, believe it or not, want it or not, his goodness and mercy are pursuing you all the days of your life.
  - B. **NON-CONTINGENT GRACE: Grace has no strings attached.**
    1. When Ruth made her commitment to Naomi, all the "ifs" were resolved in her own heart before Naomi ever lifted a finger.
    2. So it is with God. He says,
      - a) **"I will love them freely." (Hosea 14:4)**
    3. Without condition. Without charge. Without payment. Without merit. Without earning it, deserving it, working for it, or even wanting it.
    4. God's love flows to you spontaneously, and you don't have to earn it or purchase it, deserve it or repay it. God loves you because of who and what he is, not because of who and what you are.
  - C. **ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE: Grace has already provided everything you need for every circumstance of your life.**
    1. From his vantage point up on top of Mount Eternity, your dad in heaven has already previewed your whole life. He knows you live in a fallen world. He knows you are a fallen person. He has already looked forward into the corridors of time and has taken careful note of every need, every desire, every circumstance, every problem, every opportunity, every temptation, every everything you will ever need till the day you finally head home to heaven. God knows.
    2. But more than that, God provides.
    3. Grace means has already provided all the resources you need to deal with every tough time you will ever face.
      - a) **"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)**
      - b) Which means: There is...
        - (1) No time, no place, no situation, no circumstance,
        - (2) No problem, no illness, no loss,
        - (3) No heartbreak, heartache, addiction, or dysfunction,
        - (4) No bad news, perplexity, confusion, or doubt,
        - (5) No relationship conflict, failure, trial, temptation, or trouble,
        - (6) No chemical imbalance,
        - (7) No family of origin chaos,
        - (8) No habituated response,
        - (9) No regret, no despair, no enemy,
        - (10) No nothing...but that God has pre-provided every need your crazy life will ever face. There are showers of grace falling on your head every single day, every single minute.
      - c) There's no such thing as an un-graced Christian.
      - d) The table is already set, come and dine.
    4. BUT... In spite of that...
      - a) Naomi stills declares, "I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty."
    5. But is that true?
      - a) When she went away from Bethlehem, she wasn't full, she was empty. There was a famine; that's why they left in the first place. So that part's wrong.
      - b) When she came back to Bethlehem, she wasn't empty. The barley harvest was in full swing, the famine was over, and now she has this game-changer named Ruth standing at her side with a commitment to bless her till death to us part, so help me God. That is the opposite of empty! So that part is wrong too.
    6. Even though the facts say otherwise, Naomi declares herself to be graceless and God's supply to be insufficient.
    7. It's not a deficit of grace; it's a deficit of faith... That's always, always, always the problem.
- VII. The Invisible Barrier
- A. There's a cause for Naomi's blindness. It's super common and super important.
  - B. That cause is revealed in this name change that Naomi demands. She says...

1. "Call me Mara."
2. Call me Bitterness.
- C. Let me read you something from the New Testament that I believe provides the key to understanding what's happening with Naomi, and perhaps with many of us.
- D. This takes us back to where we started. I quoted part of the verse about Esau, but here's the whole thing:
  1. *"looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."* (Hebrews 12:15-16)
- E. This is one of the most insightful paragraphs on human psychology ever written. Let me translate this verse from the original Greek in a way that brings that out:
  1. "Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any deeply rooted BITTERNESS (unresolved hurt and simmering anger) surfaces to cause needless drama, and by this many people get hurt; lest there be any morally broken or spiritually distant person like Esau, who for one morsel of food traded away his sacred birthright." (Hebrews 12:15-16)
- F. Here's the takeaway:
  1. **The primary force that makes a person fall short of the grace of God is deeply rooted bitterness (unresolved hurt and simmering anger).**

#### VIII. The Root of Bitterness

- A. What's fascinating is that Naomi literally asks to be renamed "Bitterness." She's not hiding it. She's announcing it. It's become her badge of identity.
  1. "Call me Mara."
  2. That's Hebrew for call me Bitterness. That's who I am now.
- B. In this name change, Naomi reveals exactly what Hebrews warns about—the very thing that's keeping her from experiencing the grace of God. She has allowed her hurt to define her.
  1. She has consented to being identified more by her pain than by God's grace.
- C. And she's blaming God.
- D. All bitterness is ultimately against God. God is mean. God is a bully. God is a thug.
- E. Naomi interprets everything that's happened to her through this filter: "The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me... The LORD has testified against me... The Almighty has afflicted me."
- F. Even though there's no evidence in the text that God was punishing her—in fact, the narrator shows us God ending the famine and providing Ruth—that's how Naomi sees it. Her bitterness has created a distorted image of God. It always does.
- G. And that's when you're vulnerable to doing what Esau did: trading away your birthright.
- H. What is your birthright?
  1. **Your birthright is the full experience of God's grace. It's knowing your sacredness before your Father and experiencing the blessings of his love.**
- I. But when we're bitter, we trade that birthright for something vastly inferior: the temporary satisfaction of being right, of holding onto our grievances, of refusing to forgive, of blaming God.
  1. Esau traded his birthright—his future inheritance, his sacred position in God's covenant family—for a bowl of stew. He couldn't see how precious he was; how loved he was; how much he mattered.
  2. Naomi traded her name of grace for a name of bitterness. She's trading her experience of grace for a narrative of accusation and resentment.
  3. The only person anywhere near these stories who has any grasp of grace is an alien from a foreign land who has given up everything to follow God and to bless another person... Ruth, standing there patiently waiting while Naomi rants about how bad God is, the very God that Ruth just put all her faith in.
  4. Which, by the way, is the very thing that your Heavenly Father is doing every time you go on a rant complaining about him.

#### IX. The Most Important Truth

- A. So what is faith, really? We've been circling this question throughout our message.
  1. Is faith just believing the right doctrines? Yes, but it's more than that.
  2. Is faith just trusting in the promises of God? Yes, but it still goes deeper.
  3. Is faith resting in the character and love of God? Yes, but there's still something more.
- B. Here's the biggest takeaway I'd like to give you today:
  1. **QUESTION: What is faith?**
  2. **ANSWER: Faith is consenting to be loved by God.**
- C. Let that sink in for a moment.
- D. Faith is consenting to be loved by God.
  1. When you look at Naomi's struggle, what was it really about? Wasn't it a refusal to consent to God's love in her suffering? By renaming herself "Bitterness," she was essentially saying, "I refuse to be Naomi (Pleasant) anymore. I won't consent to that identity or to the love it implies."
  2. When you look at Esau's tragic choice, what was it really about? Wasn't it refusing to consent to the covenantal love represented in his birthright? He traded away the love that was his to fill an appetite that would never go away.
  3. Ruth, by contrast, made a radical act of consent: "God, you belong to me and I belong to you." She opened herself to a new covenant of love, sight unseen, based on faith.
- E. Faith is consenting to be loved by God.
  1. In every trial, in every pain...

- a) The temptation is to go rogue.
- b) The temptation is to settle for less.
- c) The temptation is to give up or turn inward.
- d) The temptation is to walk away from the one whose only desire is to love you.

F. All along the Father has His arms open, waiting for you to run into His embrace.

X. Conclusion

- A. When Naomi said, "Call me Mara," she wasn't just changing her name. She was declaring her theology. She was announcing to the universe: "I reject the narrative of grace. I embrace the narrative of victimhood." And in that moment, though grace surrounded her, God's love felt a million miles away.
- B. God is a gentleman.
- C. He leaves the choice with you.
  - 1. Grace is always present, but never imposed. It must be received. It must be consented to.
- D. It's ironic, actually. Here's Ruth standing beside Naomi. And here's Naomi complaining nobody loves her and God's out to get her.
  - 1. I've done it. I suspect you've done it too.
- E. We are fallen members of a fallen race. Sin infected everything. The world is broken and so is the human heart.
  - 1. The cosmos groans under the weight of the Fall. This is true.
  - 2. But behind that groan, if you listen carefully, if you consent to hear it, the cosmos also sings with a melody of love.
- F. The question is not whether grace exists or whether it's available to you. The question is whether you will consent to be defined by it rather than by your losses and your pain.
- G. I'm not judging you. I'm not criticizing you. I'm trying to show you a better way.
- H. Faith is consenting to be loved by God.

XI. The Ultimate Revelation of Love

- A. I want you to know that God loves you today as much as he loves Jesus.
  - 1. **Whatever the Father feels when he looks at his Son is exactly how he feels when he looks at you.**
- B. You've been made one with Christ.
  - 1. You've been baptized into Christ. You've been plunged into him. You are one with Jesus. On the day you believed in Jesus, in that very first second of your faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit of God did the biggest miracle the world has ever seen: he placed you into permanent union with Jesus Christ.
  - 2. God can't love you any more than he already does today.
- C. You are so joined to Christ that he is in you, and you are in him.
  - 1. His status is your status.
  - 2. His powers are your powers.
  - 3. His privileges are your privileges.
  - 4. His glorious are your glories.
  - 5. His throne is your throne.
  - 6. His treasures are your treasures.
  - 7. His riches are your riches.
- D. Consent to let him love you.
  - 1. Let him love you by reminding you of perfect forgiveness by his blood.
  - 2. Let him love you by giving you strength to go on day by day.
  - 3. Let him love you by being for you an ever-present help in time of need.
  - 4. Let him love you by being the shepherd of your soul.
  - 5. Let him love you by whispering again and again, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
  - 6. Let him love you by leading you day by day into the abundance and peace that he promised.
  - 7. Let him love you by standing watch as your shield and defender.
  - 8. Let him love you by guiding you step by step all along the way.
  - 9. Let him love you by locking you in his arms with a salvation so strong you couldn't lose it if you tried.
  - 10. Let him love you with a grace so scandalous you're tempted to object that it's too easy and too free.
  - 11. Let him love you with the certainty of heaven, peace that passes understanding, and joy unspeakable and full of glory.
- E. People with a difficult story can find that it's hard to let love in.
- F. But here's Jesus!
  - 1. Here's a friend you can trust. Here's a love that will not let you go.
    - a) It's your birthright.
    - b) It's your dignity.
    - c) It's your highest honor.
    - d) It's the reason you're still drawing breath.
- G. I'm not telling you to be a better person today. I'm not telling you to work harder or strive more diligently. I'm not telling you to behave or improve anything.
- H. I'm just telling you to believe that your Father is better than you ever thought he was, and go on day by day in a simple childlike faith, saying, Yes, God, it's okay to love me... to bless me... to grace me... to be God to me.
  - 1. Don't fall short of grace.
  - 2. Don't trade your birthright.
- I. I'm preaching and I'm praying that you will walk every day with the kind of faith that simply consents to be loved God.