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Conquering Incrementalism

Ruth 1

Prayer: *Father, again, I just thank you for who you are, I thank you for the gift that you've given to us in your Son, the gift that you've given to us in your word. And Lord, this time, this Sunday we're starting a new series. We're opening the book of Ruth and again there's so much in there for us to glean and to get. Again we just pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would be guiding us, that you'd be giving us the power and the presence of your Spirit, that you would be enabling us to open up your book and to make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The time of judges in Israel's history was a time in which the nation seesawed between belief and apostasy, between blessing and cursing. Probably the most famous quote in the book of Judges is the one that describes the prevailing ethos at the time in Israel. It's *Judges 17:6* which says: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* If you remember the last time that we were in the book of Judges we did a

study on Gideon, and if you remember at that time when God first appeared to Gideon, the nation of Israel was at an all-time low. They had been so overwhelmed by their enemies, the Midianites, that every time they came near to bringing in a crop, they wound up being attacked and having their crops stolen. In fact when God appeared to Gideon, we find him, he's in a winepress trying to thresh out his wheat in order to avoid being attacked and there he bitterly complained to God himself that God has abandoned them. Well, Gideon's story was one of Israel's rejection of God and God's subsequent punishment of Israel which was often manifested in famine or in military defeat. It was famine that drove the story of Ruth as it has driven many others. Abraham went to Egypt because of famine and Jacob did the very same thing. And in the book of Ruth we find famine has driven Elimelech and his family to one of the worst places they could ever be and that would be Moab.

Ruth 1 begins this way: In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

Moab had an awful history with Israel going back many, many years. In fact their history goes back to an incestuous relationship that Lot's daughters had with their father. They felt their line was going to end and so they decided to get their father drunk and lay with him in order to get pregnant and thus continue their line. *Genesis 19 says: Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day.* Well, as you can imagine, these folks were considered enemies of God. At times they were flat out at war with Israel, at other times they were at peace. Ruth's time was a time of peace between Israel and Moab even though Moab worshiped pagan gods like Chemosh who demanded human sacrifice. Commentators are divided as to whether or not Elimelech sinned by even going to Moab. Bethlehem which was known as the house of bread had become a place of starvation with no bread at all due to the sin of the Israelites and Elimelech thought the wisest course for him and his family was to leave Bethlehem and head for this God forsaken place that at least for this point had bread. We're told that Elimelech and his family were Ephrathites which means that they were probably very established, probably even wealthy family. Naomi describes her journey to Moab by saying: *"I went out full but came back empty."* And the reason why is this -- quote -- *"they went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with*

her two sons."

Now to lose a husband in that culture was a huge blow economically, I mean, obviously this is a place that does not have social security or widow's benefits and you fit into the economy as long as you have the manpower to do so. Naomi may have lost her husband but at least she had two sons. They would be her social security net. They would be her source or provision into her adult years except -- quote -- "*Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.*" This is about as bleak as you can get. I mean Naomi now has no husband and no sons. She was cut off economically from this culture of strangers that she has moved to and she no longer has any connection to the labor force. I mean not only does she have no hope, she has now no future.

The book of Ruth is really a story about a number of heroes of the faith of whom Ruth was preeminent. There's also a brief mention of what I would call "zeroes of the faith", and that would be the lot of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion. The only news that scripture has to tell us about them is that some time after they left Bethlehem,

Elimelech died and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, took Moabite wives and lived in Moab for about ten years and then died at a young age. I mean in terms of their impact before God, before country and before their family, we see a big fat goose egg. And what it points to is that in the kingdom of God there will always be heroes and zeroes, and the pathway to becoming a zero is almost effortless. All you have to do to become a zero is nothing. Naomi's family is a case in point. Elimelech left Israel for Moab and there to the surprise of no one, his sons found wives. And they appeared to simply exist in a culture that had nothing but antipathy for their God and incrementally you see them become neutralized. Now American culture may not be Moab as yet but it is rapidly headed there, and unless we are actively swimming against the tide of this culture, we too will be swept away and neutralized. My guess is that Elimelech and his sons just tried to fit in with the culture, to not make any significant waves, to just try to get along by going along. But here's the problem with that kind of thinking. You see, this world is not static, it is dynamic and that means that everything in this world has movement in it. You are always either moving toward or away from the kingdom of God. And you know, many folks think they can just kind of sit still, just kind of duck their heads and somehow stay on the pathway of kingdom citizenship, but they are profoundly unaware of how the enemy works. And the primary tool in the enemy's arsenal

is incrementalism. His design is to push you farther and farther away from the kingdom in tiny little steps such that you don't even recognize that you're taking them. I mean the point is to keep you unaware that you are moving away from the kingdom, unaware that these little decisions have consequences. And sometimes we see God intervening directly in the lives of his children when they make decisions that are so course altering that they affect not only their lives but also the sovereign will of God. And there we see God's hand as he steps in. Abraham goes to Egypt and he decides he needs to lie about Sarah's status as his wife, claiming that she's his sister so he can avoid any potential struggles. Well, it winds up making matters ten times worse when the king of Egypt sees that Sarah is beautiful and he wants to have her. This is God putting a stop to Abraham's journey toward incremental abandonment before it goes too far. We have Lot deciding that he's going to move to a godless place like Sodom and Gomorrah only to have angels directly intervene and physically pull him out of that place before it's destroyed. We saw Gideon make heroic choices then fall back into the same pattern of incremental rebellion. Likewise Saul, David and most the other patriarchs, they often made bad choices as a result of passion or fear or greed and sometimes we see God directly intervene. But you know, if we take a step back we can really see the ebb and flow of the kingdom of God warring against the kingdom of darkness with God on occasion having to step in.

What we need to see in these choices is a pattern that has gone on under our radar from their time to ours.

You see, we are up against a very clever adversary who has an extraordinary amount of patience because he has an extraordinary amount of time. And he's been studying human beings twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for literally thousands and thousands of years. He is a genius at anthropology, the study of man. He knows how we operate. He knows our weaknesses. And he knows enough not to be foolish about making children of the kingdom make big, bad, bold, sinful mistakes. He is much more inclined to lead them to make tiny, subtle, below-the-radar decisions that when isolated one by one they would appear to be almost insignificant. But if looked on from the perspective of someone almost infinitely patient would eventually add up to complete rebellion and abandonment of the faith. And I know this and I know this because I don't have to look at Saul or Judas or any of the other faith disasters in scripture. I can look at John, a fellow who used to drive 45 minutes to my house every week just to study scripture. This was a guy who was on fire. He wants nothing to do with the gospel now. Or Josh, a nationally known Christian author or speaker who has publicly announced that he no longer believes. Or Tom who just got so involved with life itself that the things of the kingdom took second place and then third and then fourth and

then eventually no place at all. Jesus spoke at length about the seed of the gospel landing on different types of ground. I've personally seen the seed land on stony ground as I did with my friend John who embraced Jesus with all the passion you could possibly imagine only to abandon him less than a year later. Or Tom who started out with his eyes clearly on the prize but then got choked off by a dozen different side roads. And I remember how excited he was, I remember him ordering his brand new Bible from Amazon. Everything seemed to be so incredibly important to him in terms of the kingdom at that time and now he doesn't give it a moment's thought. You see in the end the enemy won simply by tempting these folks into making tiny little incremental course changes that ended up capturing their souls. Instead of heroes of the faith they became zeroes, like Elimelech and his sons.

Well, the good news is that the enemy's incrementalism is really no match for the grace of God, and God meets the enemy right where he operates, sometimes with a bold intervention like he did with Abraham, sometimes with repeated warnings like he gave to Gideon, and most times with a plea to us to be in the word enough to recognize the incremental changes the enemy loves before we get caught up in it. You see, we have to understand that we are living in our own country of Moab and we got there the same way everyone gets there and that is incrementally. And whether it's gender

fluidity or human sacrifice in the womb or the redefinition of marriage, you can be sure our culture started out looking nothing like it looks today.

In 1973 the Supreme Court made it legal for a woman in the first trimester with significant medical reason why to obtain an abortion. That was wrong from the very beginning. There is no significant reason to take the life of a child while still in the womb. But you know that wasn't the goal of the enemy. 1973 was merely a point of entry. Today I find myself staring slack jawed at the TV as 19 presidential candidates all insist that a woman has the right to take the life of her child up until the day of its birth for any reason whatsoever, including it being the wrong sex, and nobody bats an eye. The governor of Virginia decides that he wants to extend that right until after the baby is born so that parents can decide whether or not it should live. It took 47 years to get there. The enemy is extraordinarily patient. He was patient with Elimelech and Naomi as well. And at this point in the story we see name Naomi as a person incrementally compromised by ten years of Moab. And she looks, for all intents and purposes, like she could land on either side of the faith equation, either identifying with Moab or with Israel. And so in the book of Ruth we are invited into the struggle knowing, however, that God loses none of his own. Jesus said this in *John 10*. He said: "*My sheep*

hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

So why did God have mercy on Naomi and Ruth but not on her sister-in-law Orpah? I mean to be honest, I have no idea. What we see in the book of Ruth is the sovereignty of God at work. *Romans 9:14* says: *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. God says I'll have mercy on whom I have mercy and it is those who receive that mercy who remain faithful. And I'll be honest, we all struggle with the idea that it's God who makes these choices. But understand, God's starting point is that all of us are born implacably hostile to him in the first place. And without God's ongoing grace, all of us would revert right back to type. We come to Christ only because God directly intervenes in our lives to pour out the grace necessary to make that change. You know, folks bristle that God makes that choice but the major point to grasp here is that if he didn't intervene in our lives by that grace, 100 percent of us would have rejected him. And you can see that in

those that have left the faith. You know, not one of the people that I know of left the faith have any regrets whatsoever about doing so. In fact they all look back with relief that they're no longer entangled in that religious nonsense that they thought at one time mattered. There's no category of person that I am aware of that is longing to love Christ but finding that impossible. Jesus said: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."* Jesus said that because everyone who asks, seeks and knocks, does so in response to God first seeking them. *1 John 4:19* says: *We love because he first loved us.* And you know I sometimes encounter people who are terrified that they're going to lose their faith. And like John or Josh or Tom or Saul or Judas, they will one day walk away from what matters to them today. Well, I tell them that the good news is the bad news. Their concern is a sign of life. John's letter said: *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.* See, those that walk away from the faith do so simply because God's grace was never really there in the first place, and eventually they lose their own natural enthusiasm with no regrets. I mean I tell folks who are terrified of losing their faith that if and when they genuinely -- quote --

"lose it," the way to know that they've lost it is that they couldn't care less. That doesn't happen to Ruth or Naomi or anyone else who has been called by God. Their lives unfold with the very same precision and sovereign care that we see unfold in Ruth's life because God knows how to conquer incrementalism. I mean there's no question that Elimelech and Naomi were not the same people who left for Moab ten years previously. Their lives reflected the astounding patience and incredible cleverness of the enemy at work and that's precisely how he works in us today. I mean incrementally over the course of almost fifty years the enemy has taken the unthinkable and he's made it so much a part of our culture that it now becomes ho-hum. That's exactly how the enemy works. And unless and until you recognize what he's doing, you too are on a course that can take you from hero to zero simply by doing nothing. The beauty of the book of Ruth is that we see that the enemy is never operating in a vacuum and that he is constantly being one-upped by one who is infinitely more clever and more powerful and who is able to infuse through his sovereign will a pattern and ability to take the very same incremental efforts of the enemy and Romans 8:28 them. *Romans 8:28 says: And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, and to those who are called according to his purpose.* And what is glorious about the book of Ruth is that even at the very beginning when Elimelech makes his fatal decision to move to Moab, we see the

devil at work incrementally moving his family away from the kingdom but we also see God just as effectively countering those moves, and he does so by bringing a harvest back to Judah.

We pick back up at verse 6 of *Ruth 1*. It says: *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to return to the land of Judah.* You see even centuries ago news still traveled and Naomi knows that her chances of survival in Moab with no husband and no sons, those chances are extremely slim. And so she hears from the grapevine that Bethlehem has once again become this house of bread and so she decides that the wisest course is to return to the place where she knows she still has a connection. She's got a problem. The problem is that her daughters-in-law have also lost their husbands and their connection to the Moabite economy, and they, too, are facing the same bleak future that Naomi is. And again we pick up on verse 8. It says: *But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May 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 of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they*

said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake 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.

Well, what is wrong with this picture? First of all let's look at what is right with the picture. I mean, it's obvious that Naomi's daughters-in-law deeply love her. I mean she's clearly treated them well, and they probably had made a fine family unit while things were going well. But now that economic hardship has hit them, Naomi seems to be concerned more for their well-being than for anything else. But again, here's where we see incrementalism working its way. I mean Naomi's great concern for her daughters-in-law was their lack of a husband. And it's true that was the only thing that could supply them with any type of social standing, with any type of hope for any future in terms of food, clothing and housing. But Naomi certainly seems to have placed a higher value

on those things than on her daughters-in-law's relationship with the kingdom. And perhaps the most telling is this advice that she then gives to Ruth after Orpah showers her with kisses and then leaves to return to Moab. She says in verse 15, it says: *And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* Well if incrementalism has done its job as well as it appears here, we now have Naomi greatly concerned about her daughters-in-law physical well-being but absolutely uncaring about their spiritual salvation. I mean Naomi even goes so far as to tell Ruth that Orpah has gone back to her people and her gods. Why don't you do likewise? This is classic incrementalism. By the time Naomi has decided to return to Bethlehem, she no longer sees the great distinction between the gods of Moab and the God of Israel despite how enormous those differences actually are. I mean you have to remember these are not only false gods, these are false gods that demand human sacrifice.

Before you condemn Moab, again consider how incrementalism works and understand we do the exact same thing. They sacrifice children on an altar; we sacrifice children in a clinic. We may be appalled at the Moabites but my guess is they would look at us and see something even worse. They sacrifice their children because they were afraid of crop failures and invasions of enemies. We

sacrifice children because we think we can't afford them or they're inconvenient or perhaps they're the wrong sex. So you tell me who is more monstrous, us or Moab? We've made the unthinkable ho-hum. So how do you get to a place where folks can feel comfortable sacrificing their children in the womb because they're not the right sex? You get there incrementally, in steps so patiently orchestrated that you don't even realize that you're taking them. And that's precisely how the enemy worked then and it's precisely how he works now. Incrementalism today has its eyes set on truth itself. Our culture says that I can have my truth and you can have your truth and all that matters is that we claim each of us to live true to the truths that we all believe in. Folks, that is utter demonic nonsense. Try having that kind of attitude with anything related to actual physically demonstrable truth. Let's say I believe in gravity and you claim you don't. I mean we all know you're not about to step off a ten-story ledge because when it comes to genuine physical truth, you know without a doubt that those differences really matter. Well there was a time when that kind of comparison would seem absurd, but that's not how incrementalism works. Today folks genuinely think that they have the right to pick their gender based not at all on what their demonstrable physical truths are about, which is the gender that they were born with, but on what they want them to be. Truth is no longer solid and substantive; instead it is fluid, it is malleable

and subject no longer to reality but to what I perceive as reality. And the amazing thing is our culture thinks this is something brand new. They think it's something liberating and cutting edge. They have no idea that this type of demonic incrementalism has been served up for centuries. I mean Orpah's truth is her gods in Moab. Naomi's truth is her God in Israel. And apparently from Naomi's perspective there's not much difference between the two. So Ruth, if you want to go to Orpah's god, well, that's perfectly fine 'cause after all truth is really a matter of perception. No, it's not. There's only one God who became a man, the man Christ Jesus, and that alone is truth.

Today there's no shortage of people clamoring to accept Orpah's god in the guise of an open and non judgmental approach to Christianity. And it's clearly affected the way that we present the gospel. I mean in the past I used to have the bulk of my discussion slash arguments with folks over whether or not Christianity and the Bible was actually truth, because truth mattered. Today not so much. What has happened is that now much of the struggle for truth and the true picture of what the gospel really is is happening within the confines of the church itself. I mean the Methodist Church is now splitting over gay marriage. I've been told that the PCA, which is the conservative branch of the Presbyterian Church is likely to undergo a similar split, again on

issues of sexuality. Scripture says the source of truth are being challenged as never before. And even Christ warned us these days would be coming. He said in *Matthew 24: For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 2 Timothy says: For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

See, the problem is really again the question of truth. Is the word of God absolute truth? Is God's word final? Well for many today within the Christian community that's an open question, one that's subject to much debate and discussion. Naomi seems to have lost the ability to discern the danger in embracing Orpah's gods over the God of Israel and folks today have the very same ambivalence. And whether it's Orpah's god or Ophrah's god or the real God, doesn't seem to matter much as long as your god isn't too demanding or exclusive when it comes to discerning what is biblical truth or what is popular culture served up as biblical truth. And that's the problem with incrementalism. It not only feeds you falsehood but it grows and feeds that appetite within you for more and more of the same. God says you eventually reach a point where you turn away from listening to the truth and just go wandering off

into myths. Folks, I think we are well down that road.

So how are we able to discern whether we are embracing the true gospel or wandering off into myths? Well again, let's look to Ruth because she had no such ambivalence. This is verse 16: *But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where 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. My the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."* And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Well, the critical statement here is that Ruth -- consider this. Ruth is a Moabitiss. Here we have Ruth telling Naomi that her God will be Ruth's God as well. There's a genuine difference between gospel truth as it is understood today and what Ruth is saying to Naomi. You see today you're welcome to pick any god you want because there's very little difference between them. I mean Orpah's god is Ophrah's god is Mayor Pete's god, is the god who no longer cares whether or not you believe the Bible in its entirety as the revealed will of God or that Jesus himself declared that the Bible, including the book of Ruth, was written about him. Jesus once castigated the religious leaders for not being able to see the forest for the trees. I mean he saw they could read their bibles with the best of them but they couldn't see that it was written

about Jesus. He said in *John 5*: "*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*"

So how does the story of a nice Jewish couple making a big mistake, how does that point to Christ? How does Elimelech and his sons' death point to Jesus, and what does that have to say to me? Well the first thing that it has to say to us is that decisions have consequences. Elimelech made a bad decision to leave Bethlehem in the first place and it resulted in his sons marrying Moabite women, directly violating Jewish law and that led to Naomi being abandoned in a country and a culture that was hostile to her faith. That's the bad news. But here's the good news. It's *Romans 8:28*: *God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.* You see Ruth, even though she was a Moabitess, was a woman who had been called by God and hence nothing on heaven or earth could stop God's plans for her, including the death of Elimelech and his sons. In fact God used those very things as the means to bring Ruth to Bethlehem.

So here's my question for us today. Have you ever made a truly bad decision, something that you thought that God could never either

forgive you or work out your story for good in any fashion? Well, God wants to show you through the story of Ruth that nothing is too hard for him, and no circumstance no matter how bad, how ill-advised or how just plain stupid or sinful is beyond the possibility of God turning it into something that he can use for your good and his glory, and that includes Naomi's baffling response to Ruth which we'll get to in a minute. I mean, part of truly understanding just what Romans 8:28 means is rooted in the fact that God's sovereignty precludes his ever, ever being taken by surprise by your sin or mine. There are simply no surprises whatsoever when it comes to God's knowledge of you and me.

Just think about this for a second. When Jesus went to the cross to bear our sins, he was looking more than 2,000 years into the future to cover our sins with his blood. 2,000 years ago while Jesus was hanging on the cross, he was paying for the sins you and I will commit today, tomorrow, next year, and every year until we finally come face to face with him, having had our sin debt paid in full. Knowing what God did for us on the cross makes it impossible for God ever, ever to be caught by surprise by our wickedness. God knows the very worst thing that you have ever done and he also knows the very worst thing you're ever going to do. Here's the best news of all: For reasons known only to him, he's still chosen, just like he's chosen Ruth, to fix his love on us. The

deeper into sin we fall, the greater into grace goes God. Now, does that mean we have a free ticket to sin? Again, Paul addressed that very question in *Romans 6*. He said: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* What Paul's referring to is being born again. And when you are born again, God himself comes into you, his Holy Spirit takes up residence inside you and he changes the very nature of your wants and desires. *Ezekiel 36* says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.* It's quite obvious that Ruth has had this very experience. She says, *"Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."* Now what is curious and sad is Naomi's reaction to it. I mean Ruth pours out her heart to Naomi, pledging her entire heart, mind, soul and strength to Naomi and her God and Naomi is completely nonplussed. I mean for a member of the kingdom of God, she's just heard spectacular news. Ruth has left the kingdom of darkness, she has entered into the kingdom of light, she announces the complete restructuring of her life and her commitment to follow God and kingdom wherever it leads no matter what the cost, and Naomi says

nothing. Absolute silence. *When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

What does that mean when you're silent when you should be celebrating? Well, Naomi couldn't see the hand of God. She sees herself as already drowning and Ruth as an anchor pulling her even further down. She wonders how she could possibly survive on her own let alone without having to worry about bringing a Moabitis with her on her return to Bethlehem. Either she doesn't understand the kingdom or she is so enveloped in her own pain that she can't see an inch beyond her own circumstance. Ten years of Moab could do that to anyone. A collapsing culture is doing that to us, and incrementalism is its primary weapon. Our task is to recognize it and thus deny it its power. And understand that we have the ultimate weapon, a God who is all wise, all powerful, and all loving. And if you love Jesus, he has his eyes fixed on you. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you that you have elected to have us live here in the 21st century Moab. And Lord, I just pray that, like Elimelech and his sons, we don't wind up on the zero end of equation but like Ruth we can end up on the hero end. And part of that is recognizing how slowly and surely and incrementally the enemy works. How in pieces so tiny we don't even notice he robs us of

our very souls. Father, give us the wisdom and the ability to see what is happening and not just kind of get along to go along. Give us the ability to fight against this culture, to put our feet down and to firmly plant ourselves in the only truth that matters and that is the truth of your word. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.