

# Speech And Deflate

Ruth 1:16-22    September 21, 2025

It was no easy thing to give a speech if Abraham Lincoln was also on the ticket. Many of you know that when he gave the Gettysburg Address, one of the most famous speeches in history, he wasn't even the main speaker at the event. Edward Everett was and he spoke for over 2 hours that day.

Actually, Lincoln had only been invited to the event as a courtesy. It wasn't entirely expected that he would even attend.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the rest is history.

But that was not the *only* time President Lincoln's speech far eclipsed someone else's. Perhaps you've never heard of the scandal at Lincoln's 2nd inauguration on March 4, 1865. It was then that he gave what has been remembered as the "Malice toward none" speech.

"According to journalist Noah Brooks: 'The sun, which had been obscured all day, burst forth in its unclouded meridian splendor and flooded the spectacle with glory and light' as the towering president appeared on the platform to deliver what would be the greatest speech of his life."<sup>2</sup>

His words were truly inspiring. But *another* speech was given that day. The result was not inspiration, but shock, even embarrassment. You see, Vice President Andrew Johnson also gave a speech when he was sworn in. But he had been drunk for a solid week prior. That morning he also drank heavily. He took to the platform and gave a long, slurred speech that witnesses described as "hostile, inane, incoherent, repetitive, self-aggrandizing, and sloppy."<sup>3</sup> The Times of London reporter wrote that, "He had not uttered two sentences when everyone saw something was wrong."

The mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.<sup>4</sup> In our text we have two speeches. The first is given by Ruth. It is a poetic and inspiring declaration of her bold resolve to dedicate herself to Naomi, to Israel, and to Yahweh. The second is given by Naomi. After about two sentences we see that something is wrong. Naomi's speech is not of bold resolve, but of bitter resignation.

When we left off, Naomi was trying hard to get Ruth to turn and follow her sister-in-law back to Moab and their gods, rather than going with Naomi to Bethlehem in Judah.

**Ruth 1:16-17 - <sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied: Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/did-abraham-lincoln-omit-god-from-the-gettysburg-address>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.history.com/articles/abraham-lincoln-second-inauguration>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Johnson%27s\\_drunk\\_vice-presidential\\_inaugural\\_address](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Johnson%27s_drunk_vice-presidential_inaugural_address)

<sup>4</sup> Luke 6:45

Spoken words are important in the Bible. The *first* words spoken by a character often help define that person for us.<sup>5</sup>

Ruth's first words are some of the most memorable in all Scripture.<sup>6</sup> They are full of resolve, full of faith, full of determination to follow through no matter what.

She first has to overcome Naomi's pressure for her to leave. And so, using some of the same words that Naomi used in the previous verses, Ruth counters with, "No - I *will not* go back to Moab. I *will not* go back to Chemosh. Where I'm *going* is toward your homeland, your people, and your God." And she invokes His name - Yahweh there in verse 17. She makes it clear that she has decided to anchor her life on *His* mercy and provision. She takes her oath *not* by Chemosh, but by Yahweh.

The second obstacle her faith would have to overcome is that their future was unknown. They had heard there was food in Judah, but Ruth clearly doesn't expect it to be all fun and games. In fact, given what Naomi says, Ruth might even expect the worst to happen.<sup>7</sup>

But, even if physical death is what's waiting for them at the end of this trip, Ruth says, "I accept it. I'm going to go where you go, where you die, I'll die, and I'll be buried there." What a faith! What did Job say? "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."<sup>8</sup>

Now, part of why Ruth was going was because *she* felt a responsibility toward Naomi. Notice how she said, "Don't plead with me to *abandon* you." Meaning, "I have responsibility in our relationship and I'm going to follow through on that duty." *But*, she wasn't only going to Bethlehem out of obligation. Ruth says, "If you die, I'm *still* going to stay in Judah. I'll be buried there."

What she was abandoning was her homeland, her culture, her old gods, her old life and stepping into a brand new life, a new place, a relationship with a new God, a new culture, a new future.

That's a great picture of being saved by Jesus Christ. We turn to God from our idols, we follow Him in faith and obedience, and He makes all things new. He gives us a new heart, a new mind, a new life purpose, a new spiritual family, new goals, new responsibilities and opportunities, new values, new language, new desires, all brimming with hope through His mercy and grace.

Again, Ruth doesn't expect this life of faith to be easy. In fact, she uses some terms here which indicate she doesn't really anticipate their lives are going to be comfortable or stable.<sup>9</sup> But her faith is alive and resolved and bold - a faith that sets her mind and directs her steps.

**Ruth 1:18 - <sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.**

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Block *The New American Commentary, Volume 6: Judges, Ruth*

<sup>7</sup> Robert Hubbard, Jr. *The Book Of Ruth*

<sup>8</sup> Job 13:15

<sup>9</sup> Alter

After such an *incredible* speech - one of the greatest in all the Bible - we'd *hope* to see a moment of embrace, maybe a moment of prayer or praise. Instead, Naomi gives her the silent treatment.

Imagine you just poured out your heart to someone - you laid it all bare in total vulnerability - and they said *nothing* in response, but turned and started walking. That's a rough moment.

Now, it's *possible* that Naomi just stopped trying to convince her to leave. But given how we've seen and how we *will* see Naomi behaving in this chapter, our narrator seems to be painting a dramatic contrast for us.

One scholar writes, "*Though the phrase is slightly ambiguous, apparently Naomi withdrew into silence for the rest of the trip up into the Judean hills. The storyteller wants the audience to feel either slight alienation between the two women, or Naomi's preoccupation with her painful, uncertain future.*"<sup>10</sup>

Another writes, "*Our narrator describes no warm embrace, no loving words of gratitude for such commitment. Surely such a lack of reaction to Ruth's...impassioned devotion speaks volumes about the bitterness that consumes Naomi in her return.*"<sup>11</sup>

But in that silence, if her mother-in-law wouldn't speak to her, then Ruth could talk to her heavenly Father. As she went, she could remind herself that she was not following Naomi, she was seeking Yahweh.

Don't put your faith in another Christian. Whether that's a family member or some Christian figure. If you do, you *will* be disappointed, because *all of us* are going to let others down at some point or another. We put our faith in God alone. Our faith is in Christ, Who *never* lets us down. He is always faithful, always good, always right, always able, always present, even when father and mother forsake us, even when the world is against us, even when we don't know what's ahead, we know the *Lord* is before, behind, and beside us, pouring out His love and grace in and through our lives.

**Ruth 1:19 - <sup>19</sup> The two of them traveled until they came to Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, the whole town was excited about their arrival, and the local women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"**

This is a great moment. They aren't being rude when they say, "Can this be Naomi?" Quite the opposite. This is a glad cry of recognition.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the term for excitement there is the same one used of when the Ark of the Covenant came into the camp or at the inauguration of King Solomon.<sup>13</sup> The whole town was buzzing with joy that, after a *decade*, Naomi was back!

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<sup>10</sup> Hubbard

<sup>11</sup> Frederic Bush *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 9: Ruth/Esther*

<sup>12</sup> Bush

<sup>13</sup> Edward Campbell, Jr. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*

Let their example be an inspiration to us. God's people are called to welcome others with open arms. That does *not* mean we don't call sin sin or that we don't tell people the truth in love. But, *anyone* should be able to come into our gathering and experience a warm welcome. Whether that person is in good spirits or low, whether that person is known to us or a stranger, whether they have been prodigal for 10 years or are outsiders seeking the Lord.

Now, sometimes that's hard. It's hard to fully embrace the Moabite standing in the door. In fact, the townsfolk here don't really say anything to Ruth. But, as we'll see, she was welcomed in with courtesy and grace. We want to be a group of people who also welcome others in so they can know the love of God, the *truth* of God, and have their lives transformed.

**Ruth 1:20 - <sup>20</sup> "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara," she answered, "for the Almighty has made me very bitter.**

Not exactly life of the party. Naomi begins her short and spicy speech here. One that would've been hard for everyone there to hear. Her speech is an outburst of four accusations against God.<sup>14</sup>

She doesn't double down on blaming God, she *quadruples* down! She says, "God has *made me bitter.*" But that isn't what God does. He is the God Who gives us peace. The God Who gives songs in the night.<sup>15</sup> The God Who gives us His joy so we can be strong.<sup>16</sup> He is the Lifter of our heads.

Naomi says, "The *Almighty God* has *forced* bitterness on me." But even here we see her *choosing* bitterness. "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara." Naomi means "pleasant," or "sweetness."<sup>17</sup> Mara means "bitter." But on top of that, the name "Mara" meant something to an Israelite.

What would you think if a friend said, "Don't call me Bill, call me Columbine." Or, "Call me Donner Pass?"

In Exodus 15 we read the story of the Israelites arriving to a place called Marah where the water was bitter. They couldn't drink it. So, as usual they grumbled to Moses. But then what happens? The Lord shows Moses a tree, tells him to throw the tree into the water, and the water miraculously became drinkable. And then it says that the Lord *tested* Israel there. He says, "If you obey My commands and do what's right, I'm going to help You, because I am Yahweh Who *heals* you."<sup>18</sup>

So now, here's Naomi saying, "I'll stick with the bitter, thanks. I don't believe God will heal me." In fact, she goes on:

**Ruth 1:21 - <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

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<sup>14</sup> Block

<sup>15</sup> Job 35:10

<sup>16</sup> Nehemiah 8:10

<sup>17</sup> Alter, Block

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 15:22-27

Listen - God did not bring her back empty. He brought her back *to fill her life* in ways she couldn't even imagine. He did not *oppose* her, He orchestrated her rescue, called out to her with the good news, had a place waiting for her when she returned, and was going to do even more.

But Naomi *felt* like Yahweh was the source of her misery.<sup>19</sup> Her emotions told her that it was God who heaped all this trouble onto her.<sup>20</sup> Her circumstances had worn her down and she resigned.

We have to be a little critical of Naomi's words and choices in chapter 1. Even if we try to give her all the benefit of the doubt, she is most definitely pitting herself against Yahweh in *this* moment.<sup>21</sup>

But here's the great news about Naomi: This is the *start* of her story, not the end! By the end, she's *not* going to be Mrs. Bitter-Fear-Face. She'll be Mrs. Sweetness again. We see her totally restored to faith in God, worshipping God, being used by God, a precious part of His amazing work.

Naomi's story is one of the most amazing in the Old Testament. Her example shows us how we can return to God after living as prodigals. How God can bring us joy after life has beaten us down. How broken hearts can be mended by His *hesed* love. But we don't want to cheapen the impact of chapter 4 by excusing what's going on in chapter 1.

But already, she is making progress toward the Lord because *she returned*. Look at verse 22.

**Ruth 1:22 - <sup>22</sup> So Naomi came back from the territory of Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.**

The Hebrew calls Naomi "the one who returned" in this verse.<sup>22</sup> She has started a process that results in restoration. And though she and Ruth still have no resources or prospects in the moment, they're in position God wants them so He can work His *providence* in their lives.

Look at how the verse ends: They arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest. The earliest of the major harvest seasons in Israel.<sup>23</sup> They arrived at *exactly* the right time for their needs to be met. At exactly the right time for the rest of the story to unfold. They weren't too early, they weren't too late.

It's not too late for you, either. No matter what's going on in your life, in your circumstances, in your past, the worries you have about the future, your life is not hopeless. You are known and loved by a God Who will literally move heaven and earth to accomplish His good purposes for you if need be. Hope is on the horizon, because the Redeemer is there, waiting to bring you into His forever home.

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<sup>19</sup> Victor Matthews, Mark Chavalas, and John Walton *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*

<sup>20</sup> Hubbard

<sup>21</sup> Block

<sup>22</sup> *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*, Hubbard

<sup>23</sup> Matthews, et al.

When Andrew Johnson gave his embarrassing speech, one American newspaper wrote that he was, "Crazed with liquor."<sup>24</sup> That day, that speech, was not a high point in his life.

Evaluating our speech today, the things overflowing out of our hearts, don't become a person who is defeated by bitterness. The Lord is not against you. He loves you. He's called to you. He wants to draw you to Himself. Even when life is not easy, even when it's uncertain, we can trust Him. Like Ruth, we can have a bold faith, a bold resolve to follow Him, knowing He is faithful.

If you find yourself *feeling* the kinds of things Naomi described in her speech, take to heart the encouraging command of Hebrews 12. Don't allow a root of bitterness to spring up in your life because it not only defiles, it causes great trouble.

Part of the problem was that Naomi forgot what was eternally true. She said, "Why are you calling me Naomi?" The answer is: Because that's who you are! But no, Naomi said, "I'm the person God hates. I'm the person God has forsaken. I'm the person whose life has no hope." She *felt* those things, but they weren't true. What was true? That God loved her. That He still had a plan for her life. That He could bring beauty from her ashes. That today was the day for her not to oppose Him, but to fall into His arms of love.

Today, let's move toward God in faith, knowing He is good, and that the closer we are to Him, the more He is able to do for us what He has promised by His power, His provision, and His providence.

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<sup>24</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_Johnson%27s\\_drunk\\_vice-presidential\\_inaugural\\_address](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Johnson%27s_drunk_vice-presidential_inaugural_address)