

08-16-15

RUTH – A Redemption Story

Ruth 1:16

“What makes a good movie or novel? What about tragedy, death, loyalty, vivid characters, abiding love, and a happy ending? That’s the book of Ruth, the Bible’s classic love story, a timeless and true tale of ruin and redemption.

The opening line of Ruth is a snapshot of Israel during the time of the judges: ‘Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land.’ From start to finish, Ruth’s story is about redemption. The Hebrew word for redeem and redemption occur over twenty times in this book.” This is one indication of the central theme of the book. (Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible, Dr. David Jeremiah, p.45)

How many times have you been tempted to take matters into your own hands rather than wait on God’s promises? Sometimes His promises seem to be not coming at all and other times waiting is just too hard when we can do something on our own to seemingly help the situation.

This what seems to have happened here in our story of Ruth. Of course, God had a plan all along, but impatience won out for Elimelech and his family. God has a plan for you and your life. He has some promises that He will never neglect. His timing is not ours though. Patience is required along with faith in order to realize His will for our lives. Sometimes in the midst of our circumstances we lose sight of what God promised to begin with. Time plays a part in this as does disappointments.

Tell the story up to this point then read the key verse... Elimelech – married to Naomi with 2 sons in Bethlehem. Famine in the land caused him to panic for his family. Moved to Moab. God’s will? No. This was the Promised Land – the land God promised to His people with all provision. Part of the promise was that God would be with them and never leave or abandon them – as PJ mentioned 2 weeks ago.

Didn’t they trust God? It’s hard when things look bad!

In Moab, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi and her two sons. The sons married Moabite women, and eventually both sons died as well, leaving Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. Naomi hears that the famine is over in Israel. In desperation, Naomi decided to go back to her land of origin. All three women were now childless with no means of support. Naomi asks her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab and go back to their families. Orpah agrees. Ruth stays for the long haul bringing us to our key verse today. Orpah is unwilling to exchange the unknown for what she knows in her land. Ruth – unwilling to leave Naomi – even if it takes her to the unknown.

According to the Law – Moabites were not allowed to be a part of the Jewish community. But God’s grace overruled in Ruth’s case, permitting her a descendant, David, to become the king of Israel.

(Deut. 23:3-6) - “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. ⁴ These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in distant Aram-naharaim to curse you. ⁵ But the LORD your God refused to listen to Balaam. He turned the intended curse into a blessing because the LORD your God loves you. ⁶ As long as you live, you must never promote the welfare and prosperity of the Ammonites or Moabites.

Peterson in *The Message*, starts this book with “Once upon a time...” A perfect start to a perfect book that should end with “And they lived happily ever after...”

Read: Ruth 1:16

But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.”

“By her acceptance of Naomi’s God, Ruth became a picture of what Paul would teach centuries later: it’s not by physical descent from Abraham that one is redeemed, but by the faith of Abraham.” (Rom. 4:11)

Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith.

There is no greater bond than a friendship or relationship built on a common faith in Jesus. I loved my friend George for many reasons, but our link was our relationship with God, and this brought us more together than any other common links of hobbies or work or anything else in our lives.

There are 2 books named after women in the Bible – Ruth and Esther.

Esther: a Jewish girl marries a prominent Gentile (King Ahasuerus).

Ruth: a Gentile girl marries a prominent Jew (Boaz).

God used Esther to save His people from physical destruction. (Physical salvation).

God used Ruth as a genealogical link in the Messianic line. First to David, and ultimately to Christ, who would save His people from their sins. (Spiritual salvation).

Boaz was actually a descendant of Rehab of Jericho (a gentile) – who provided safety for Joshua and Caleb. Ruth enters the lineage of Christ as Boaz’ wife. Rehab and Ruth show God’s grace since neither would have been accepted into Jewish lineage due to their ethnic origin.

“The book of Ruth is essentially a woman’s story, and God has set His seal of approval upon it by its inclusion in the divine library.” (Vernon McGee)

Benjamin Franklin (statesman and inventor) story...

“While serving in France in the courts, he heard some aristocrats “putting down” the Bible as being unworthy of reading, lacking in style, and so forth. He sat in on the Infidels’ Club – a group of intellectual snobs who gave literary critiques and had discussions related to such. Though not a believer himself, his time in the American colonies as a youth exposed him to the excellence of the Bible as literature. So he decided to play a trick on the French. He wrote Ruth out longhand, changing all the proper names to French names. Then he read his manuscript to all the elite of France. They all exclaimed on the elegance and simplicity of style of this touching story. “But where did you find this gem of literature, Monsieur Franklin?”

It comes from that book you despise, he answered, The Bible. There were some red faces in Paris that evening, just as there should be in our own biblically illiterate culture today for neglecting God’s Word.” (Adventuring the Bible, Ray Stedman).

Authorship of Ruth, though not mentioned specifically, is attributed mostly to Samuel.

Date: possibly within or soon after David's reign (1011 – 970 BC).

The book contains themes of love, devotion, and true romance – And Redemption! There's a story behind the story – The romance of redemption.

The first chapter lists the main characters before we get to Boaz...

Elimelech – God is King – the patriarch of this family, but led them to Moab rather than trust God.

Naomi – Pleasant – but turned bitter due to the circumstances she faced.

Bethlehem – House of bread – God's provision – no bread – a famine instead.

The invisible hand of God is evident to us – Ruth went to glean in the fields, and “found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz.” (Accident?)

This is a story of Boy meets Girl – 3 months gleaning there in his field – They arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest and continued through to the wheat harvest.

Time of the judges: A time while people were wandering away from God, a gentile maiden named Ruth had faith that shown brightly.

In our story – Boaz is a redeeming relative who buys back the land that belonged to Elimelech and raises up posterity to continue the family name. He is a type of Christ, the true Redeemer Relative of Ruth. Ruth, the gentile Moabitess, is a type of the church, redeemed by His wonderful grace – to all people – not just Jews.

Redeemer (definition) – “One who frees or delivers another from difficulty, danger, or bondage, usually by the payment of a ransom price.

O.T. – a redeemer could buy back property and even people sold under duress. Boaz - well known redeemer bought back the land of Naomi's husband, Elimelech. God Himself is the Redeemer of Israel (Is. 41:14; Ps. 78:35).

N.T. – Christ is the ultimate redeemer of all humanity – He gave His life as a ransom for many.” (Mk. 10:45). Believers have “redemption through His blood.” (Eph. 1:7)

Redemption: refers to salvation from sin, death, and the wrath of God by Christ's sacrifice.” (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

Peterson: “Once upon a time” beginning to a “they lived happily ever after” ending. A simple and powerful love story – BUT – the final genealogy ending really reveals the true meaning and purpose...

Through the union of Ruth and Boaz came David. And through David came the Savior of the World.

Notice the different attitudes of the three widows:

Naomi was a grieving widow, stripped of the earthly joys of husband and family by divine judgment.

Orpah, having soberly considered the words of her mother-in-law, proved to be a leaving widow, choosing the easiest and most convenient course.

Ruth was *a cleaving widow*, clinging to Naomi in spite of Naomi's discouragements. When Ruth chose a new life with Naomi, she knew that it wouldn't be easy. There was hard work and poverty ahead since they were without a male provider. There was separation from home and loved ones, too.

Coincidence should always raise our attention to God...

They arrived in Israel at the beginning of the barley harvest – the time of the feast of first-fruits – a time recognized later as the resurrection of Jesus.

Naomi (Pleasant) left full, but returned empty - Mara (Bitter). She left with a husband and sons, but returned empty of this. Same for us. If we go out in our own strength (full), God may bring us back to Him empty and completely dependent on Him. That's where He wants us to begin with. Empty.

Back to our story...

Boaz took a shine to Ruth from the beginning and ordered his servants to leave extra grain behind for her to glean. He also asked her to have lunch with his servants. He asked her to stay on his fields going forward for the harvest. Things were working out well in the story.

Naomi knew the details of the Law, but Ruth was naïve. She only obeyed what Naomi told her. Yet, this was according to God's plan for them. Naomi could see that the Lord was working things out well for her and Ruth. Naomi instructed Ruth to stay gleaning in Boaz' fields knowing he was a close relative.

We too should not wander from the Lord's promised provision and protection into the fields of worldly pleasures. The gleanings of God's fields are better than the abundance of the world's fields.

The next step was for Ruth to show Boaz she was willing and available to be redeemed along with Naomi's land. She was instructed to go to the threshing floor and lay at Boaz' feet covering herself with the corner of his blanket. Boaz woke around midnight and noticed her. He recognized the symbol even if Ruth didn't realize it herself. She mentioned he was a relative who could redeem her. He accepted the responsibility gladly. He told her there was one closer than he, but he would see to it the next day that things would be resolved one way or the other.

Boaz went to the city gate where legal decisions were made by the minion (10 Jewish leaders who met there). He saw and called for the other relative (nameless in our story). Before the leaders he offered the relative the opportunity to redeem the land of Naomi – he gladly accepted. However Boaz told him that along with land, came the marriage of Ruth. Naomi gave up her right to marriage and transferred it to Ruth. The closer relative was no longer willing to follow through. The land would eventually go to Ruth's descendants and not him, so he gave his right to redeem to Boaz who gladly accepted the entire package. Only God could pull this off like this.

So Boaz married Ruth and redeemed her and the land for Naomi. They had a baby and named him Obed. Our story could end here with, "And they lived happily ever after. – The End" But the author goes one step further. He adds a bonus to the ending by giving us a genealogy going forward. Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of David, the second King of Israel and a man after God's own heart. David's line would eventually be used by God to bring Jesus Christ into the world.

Ruth is a transition book as well as a great love story. It bridges the span from the Judges of Israel to the time of the Kings found in the following books of 1 and 2 Samuel. Because it ends with the genealogy to David, it must have been written after these things were known.

We have been tying our times in these O.T. books to Jesus in some way. Ruth does this for us quite plainly by this genealogy at the end. Jesus came through the line of David, the great grandson of Ruth. So a Gentile girl becomes part of the lineage of Jesus Christ who came to save all humanity, not just Jews or any select few.

There is a moving story of Steinberg and a gypsy girl. Struck with her beauty, Steinberg took her to his studio and frequently had her sit for him. At that time he was at work on his masterpiece "Christ on the Cross." The girl used to watch him work on this painting. One day she said to him, "He must have been a very wicked man to be nailed to a cross like that." "No," said the painter. "On the contrary, he was a very good man. The best man that ever lived. He died for others." The little girl looked up at him and asked, "Did he die for you?" Steinberg was not a Christian, but the gypsy girl's question touched his heart and awakened his conscience, and he became a believer in Him whose dying passion he had so well portrayed. Years afterward a young Count chanced to go into the gallery at Dresden where Steinberg's painting of "Christ on the Cross" was on exhibition. The painting spoke so powerfully to him that it changed the whole tenor of his life. He was Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, founder of the Moravian Brethren. (Clarence Macartney, Preaching without Notes).

***Chief of sinners though I be,
Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high,
Lives that I may never die.***

(William McComb, quoted in William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke)

The story of Ruth gives us a glimpse into God's detailed plans. Each of us, no matter how insignificant, plays a part in God's plan. Who we are and what we do matters. Just as Ruth was just a foreign peasant girl, she played a great part in God's plan in the line of David and salvation plan of God in the world. We count! Greatly.

"Ruth shows us the importance of both human and divine love. This four chapter book teaches us to trust God who redeems the hardships of our past and who also provides for the needs of the present moment. We can entrust the future results of our day-to-day decisions to Him, who is our Kinsman-Redeemer." (Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible, David Jeremiah, p. 46).