

Moments for YOU

Volume 50, Number 2

Theme: Ruth



RUTH THE MOABITNESS

Ruth was a Moabite, a member of an accursed race. She was born and raised in paganism. The priests of Moab were powerful and cruel, and they served an assortment of gods. But the most feared god of all was Chemosh, or Moloch. Chemosh had his terrible place on a platform of movable stones under which great fires could be kindled. Chemosh's lap was so constructed that little children placed on its red-hot surface would roll down an inclined plane into his fiery belly. Ruth heard about another god—actually a fertility goddess who offered the Moabites regeneration through the gratification of lust with harlot priestesses in the temple.

So Ruth grew up a pagan, in a land cursed by the foulness and ferocity of its gods. This is the woman around whom the story in the book of Ruth revolves. The account tells how Ruth came to know the living God of Israel and how she entered the family of God through the redemptive act of a kinsman-redeemer. If any book in the Bible demonstrates God's matchless grace and illustrates the divine plan of redemption, it is the book of Ruth.

RUTH AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Long before Ruth knew anything about God, God knew everything about her: her name, where she lived, and her secret thoughts. Long before Ruth knew anything about Him, God set in motion a series of events designed to bring her face to face with Boaz, the man who became her kinsman-redeemer. It is like that with our redemption too. Long before we know Him, God works to initiate a chain of circumstances that

in the end will bring us face to face with Christ.

One day a family moved into Ruth's life, a family of believers. Ruth had never before met anyone quite like Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons. As time passed, Ruth became well acquainted with this family and even married Mahlon, one of the sons. From them she heard many talks about the things of God, for though Elimelech was a backslider, he was still a believer. Ruth discovered a world of truth of which she had never dreamed. She learned about a true and living God, a kind God, a pure and holy God, a God wholly unlike the dreadful, lustful, and savage gods of her people.

A tragedy happened; death visited that home. There were three funerals, one after the other. Elimelech died. Mahlon died. His brother Chilion, the husband of Orpah—another Moabite girl—died. At this point Ruth could have become very resentful. She could have turned on Naomi and exclaimed, "If this is an example of what your God of love does, don't ever speak to me about Him again." Ruth could have become bitter, as many people do when death invades a home. But she did not fall into that trap of the devil. God is too loving to be unkind, too wise to make any mistakes, and too powerful to be thwarted in His plans. The death of Ruth's husband was part of His plan. Mahlon *had* to die because there was no other way Ruth could come to know Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer. So Mahlon's death was part of the overruling sovereignty of God.

A crisis came for Ruth when Naomi announced that she was go-

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ing back to Bethlehem because God had “visited His people.” There had been a revival, and Naomi had made up her mind that there was going to be no more backsliding in Moab for her. She was going home to the fellowship of God’s people. Ruth must have received this news with considerable dismay because the only light she had was going out.

RUTH AND THE SALVATION OF GOD

Ruth and Orpah both made the same decision. They would go with Naomi. It looks as though both Ruth and Orpah became converts. When we get to the end of the story, however, we discover that this was not so. It happens thousands of times: under the stress of an overwhelming circumstance, in the heat of revival, or under the urging of a faithful evangelist, numbers of people come forward, but that does not mean that they are saved. Some may make a profession of faith and take initial steps toward the promised land, but all we have in such instances are roused souls, intellectual responses to the Gospel, or emotional responses to appeals.

Orpah went back to Moab, back to the demon gods of her people, back to her old way of life, and back to a lost eternity. Orpah pictures for us all those whose souls have been roused, but who have never really been saved at all. Many people turn back, their professions of faith unsupported by the evidence of their lives (Matthew 13:3-23). But let us look at Ruth.

The two widows arrived in Bethlehem and in their poverty took up their abode somewhere in town. We can imagine one day that Ruth said to Naomi, “Mother, we are very poor. I need to get a job.”

Naomi answered, “We have social security in our country,” and she explained how Ruth could glean in

the harvest field behind the reapers. All that she gleaned she could have. The grain would be hers. So we watch Ruth wend her way through the village in the dawn’s early light. We see her standing in the harvest fields, wondering which way to turn. We see her choose a portion of the field that belongs to Boaz. What a story this tells us of God’s overruling sovereignty still at work to bring this seeking soul to the Saviour. Then Ruth met Boaz. He spoke to her kindly, welcomed her into his field, provided for her thirst, and gave to her of his bounty.

We can picture the scene after that first day of gleaning when Ruth arrived home with the great pile of grain Boaz had given her. Naomi had seen gleaners many times in her life, but she had never known them to come home with an amount like that. “What is his name?” Naomi may have then asked.

Ruth says, “His name is Boaz.”

Then the light dawned on Naomi; she saw what the next step should be. “He is a near kinsman,” she told Ruth. “He is the one person in the world who can redeem you and put you into the family of God. You must go to him. Put yourself at his feet. Ask him to redeem you. Ask him to marry you. Ask him to make you his own.” Ruth made no excuses and did just that.

So Orpah remained lost in dark, pagan Moab while Ruth married a prince of the house of Judah, became a joint-heir with her redeemer, and dwelled with him in bliss.

This story of Ruth can be repeated in the life of any lost child of Adam’s ruined race who will come, in repentance and faith, to the Redeemer.

—Condensed from *Introducing People of the Bible, Volume 1* by John Phillips.

KINSMAN-REDEEMER

Ruth has come all the way from the land of Moab into the heart and home of Boaz. And we who were at one time strangers, far from God, and without hope in the world, have now been made nigh by the blood of Christ.

In Ruth chapter 4 we see the work of Boaz. He has had to stand aside with his arms folded, but now he is free to move because Ruth has claimed him as her kinsman-redeemer. And I say this reverently to you, my friend: Christ, like Boaz, is not free to move in your behalf until you claim Him as your Kinsman-Redeemer. Christ died on the cross for you, and even today He stands at the door of your heart and knocks, saying, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). But He won’t crash the door. You will have to invite Him in. God offers the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus, but you have to reach out your hand and take it by faith. By faith you receive Christ.

The kinsman-redeemer is one of the most marvelous pictures that we have of our Lord Jesus Christ who redeemed us. In other words, this story is a picture of our redemption. There were several requirements a man had to meet in order to qualify as a kinsman-redeemer. First of all, he must be a *near kinsman*. Second, he must be *willing to redeem*. Third, he must be *able to redeem*. Now Boaz was able to meet all of these conditions as the kinsman-redeemer of Ruth. And the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Kinsman-Redeemer, meets all these requirements also.

First of all, let’s consider that the kinsman-redeemer must be a

near kinsman. That is the reason that Boaz could act. Presented to us from beginning to end is the fact that Boaz was related to the family of Elimelech. And the Lord Jesus Christ is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He is a near kinsman. He is the One who took upon Himself our humanity. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). You see, He came down and took upon Himself our humanity, and He became a man. He suffered down here; He bled and died for the sins of the world—which is in the plan and program of God.

Not only must a kinsman-redeemer be a near kinsman, but he must also be *willing to redeem*. You will recall that Naomi’s other kinsman was not willing to redeem. He very frankly told Boaz, “I’ll mar my own inheritance. I cannot redeem it. You redeem my right for yourself.” But Boaz was willing—not only willing—he *wanted* to redeem it, because he loved Ruth. You and I today have a Kinsman who loves us. Why? It’s not because of anything in us. Paul said in Romans 3:24: “Being justified freely by His *grace* through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The writer to the Hebrews says, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). And so we find that the Lord Jesus, as our Kinsman-Redeemer, was willing to redeem us.

Third, a kinsman-redeemer must be *able to redeem*. I am sure that Naomi had some poor kinfolk there

in Bethlehem. It might have been that one night after Naomi had come back from Moab that these poor kinfolk came over, got out their handkerchiefs and wept. They said, “Naomi, we feel sorry for you, but we can’t help you.” It’s nice to have folks sympathize with you, but it’s wonderful to have a kinsman who is able to write a check that doesn’t bounce, and to have that kinsman come along and say, “I’ll redeem you.” Well, you and I have a Kinsman-Redeemer. He is able. “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). He is our great Kinsman-Redeemer with the ability to save. That, of course, was true of Boaz. He was called a mighty man of wealth. There was never any question about his ability. And, friend, there’s never a question about whether the Lord Jesus can redeem. He is able to save. God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name, and some day every tongue must confess and every knee must bow to Him (Philippians 2:9-11). He is able to save. And may I say, He is able to save you. The question is: Has He saved you? He wants to, and He will if you’ll trust Him as Saviour.

—Condensed from *Ruth* by J. Vernon McGee. Published by Thomas Nelson, used by permission.

It is encouraging to see the changes that have taken place in Naomi because of what Ruth did. God used Ruth to turn Naomi’s bitterness into gratitude, her unbelief into faith, and her despair into hope. One person, trusting the Lord and obeying His will, can change a situation from defeat to victory.

—Warren W. Wiersbe

RUTH’S GREAT DECISION

“And Ruth said, *Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.*” This emphatic declaration she confirmed by a solemn oath—“*The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.*” The piety, resolution, and enthusiasm of this speech convinced Naomi of the integrity and determination of Ruth, and “*When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. So they two went until they came to Bethlehem*” (Ruth 1:16-19).

The bold and devout words of Ruth revealed her to be a genuine disciple of truth. Already in her heart faith was working through love (Galatians 5:6). The “good fruit” of her lips was a clear indication that the tree was “good,” not “corrupt” (Matthew 7:16-20). Look at Ruth 1:14, where we read that in contrast with the departure of Orpah, Ruth “clave unto” Naomi. The word “clave” denotes Ruth’s complete self-surrender in love and loyalty to her new calling. She was yielding herself wholeheartedly and unreservedly to share not merely the temporal fortunes of her mother-in-law, but also the worship of Jehovah in the land of His chosen people.

To **cleave** is the term used by God at the beginning of human history to express the undivided and unchanging affection that a man should maintain for the wife of his choice (Genesis 2:24). This love is so intimate and unifying that by **cleaving** the “two shall be one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31). Moreover, **cleaving** is expressive of the loving obedience and worship-

ping service which should mark the people of God, and six times the children of Israel were exhorted by Moses and by Joshua to cleave unto Jehovah their God (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Joshua 22:5; 23:8). It is significant, therefore, that in recording Ruth's decisive step towards Bethlehem, it is said that she "clave" unto Naomi. Her choice sprang not from a mere whim of her friendly emotions, but from a rooted conviction of her soul. Her eye was upon the God of Israel rather than upon the mother of her dead husband.

Barnabas exhorted the young church at Antioch, "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). To "cleave to the Lord" includes loving the Lord, walking in His ways, obeying His Word, and serving Him wholeheartedly. It means that we belong to Him alone and that we cultivate our devotion to Him. May every child of God today heed this needed exhortation.

—W.J. Hocking, adapted.

A MAN OF CHARACTER

We cannot help but notice the integrity of the one whom Naomi has singled out as the best prospective husband for Ruth. Boaz was frank in his business dealings. At no time did he give offense. His relative had the prior claim to Naomi's land, and he not only advised him of his right but also recommended that he exercise it. All his actions were characterized by a sense of justness too little found among God's people today.

Boaz illustrates the kind of person who will put important things in writing. He obtains ten reliable witnesses to attest to what took place. He does not select people whose word might be altered with a suitable bribe. In-

stead, he chooses reliable people whose trustworthiness and knowledge were well established.

No doubt Boaz wished to marry Ruth. She appealed to him. He, therefore, faced a tension between his personal desires and his familial duty. How was this tension to be resolved? Certainly not by ignoring the rights of others or having a clandestine relationship. The tension was resolved by doing the right thing in the right way. The kind of practical righteousness Boaz demonstrated is not often found in Christian circles. We often lack patience, are selfish, and play "political games" in order to get what we want. We blame our hang-ups on our parents, our materialism on the economy, and we secretly excuse our conduct by comparing ourselves with other people. We conclude, "Well, I'm not so bad after all." Only as we open our hearts to the searching light of Holy Scripture and compare our conduct with what is revealed in God's Word do we realize how mercenary, self-centered, and ungodly we may have become.

What then are we to do if we would be characterized by the kind of practical righteousness illustrated by Boaz? The answer may be found in Boaz's Godward orientation. He lived out his life conscious all the while that God's eye was on him. We too may exhibit the same moral integrity and practical maturity if we remember that the bricks of character are laid one by one. The place to begin is with a renewed commitment of one's entire life to the Lord. With this foundation, we can build a consistent pattern of doing the right thing in the right way, and by walking with the Lord will grow toward spiritual maturity.

—Condensed from *Ruth: A Story of God's Grace* by Cyril J. Barber.

QUESTION & ANSWER

QUESTION: Why are four women mentioned in the genealogy according to Matthew? It does not seem necessary to have included them in establishing that the Lord Jesus descended from the promised seed through Abraham and King David.

ANSWER: This is a good question. As we look at these four women we will find that each one seems to point to something about salvation. Let's notice the first one that is mentioned. Her name is Tamar. As we read about her in Genesis 38 we find nothing about her that would commend itself to us as good. Disguising herself as a harlot, she tricked her father-in-law, Judah, and had twin sons by him. What was it that put her into the genealogy? It was her sin. Why then is her name included here? I believe it is to remind us that Jesus Christ came into the world not to save good people (because there are none), but *sinners* of whom Paul said he was chief (1 Timothy 1:15).

The second woman mentioned is Rahab. She lived in the city of Jericho (Joshua 2:1-22; 6:25). It was a wicked city and God was going to destroy it. Joshua had sent two spies to that city and Rahab hid them from the king of Jericho and saved their lives. She believed what the spies had told her about the coming judgment and followed their directions. Her life and the lives of her family were spared. What was it that saved her? We find the answer in Hebrews 11:31. "By *faith* the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not."

The third woman mentioned is Ruth. She was from the country of Moab, and the Bible plainly declared that: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the

Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever" (Deuteronomy 23:3). But, because of God's grace, the law does not keep Ruth out. Her child of the third generation, David, sits upon Israel's throne. So the law is set aside. "The righteousness of God *without the law* is manifested" (Romans 3:19-24).

There is one more woman in this genealogy to look at. She is listed as "the wife of Urias," but we know her better as Bathsheba. Along with her name another name comes to mind. It is David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. This was the David that said, "The Lord is my shepherd." It is David, the man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Yes, it is the same David fallen, and fallen so low that it has caused even the Lord's enemies to speak evil of the Lord and His people. David had Urias, a faithful soldier in his army, murdered in order to hide his own adultery. How could it be? It is a solemn reminder to each believer that though all our sins—past, present and future—have been forgiven, we still have the flesh in us and are capable of letting the desires of the flesh control us. Did King David lose his salvation? His cry to God was: "Restore unto me the *joy* of Thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12). *David did not lose his salvation but he did lose the joy of it.* However, though we do not lose our salvation, we do reap what we sow. As a result of King David's sin he lost four sons.

So in the four women's names in this genealogy we find that salvation is for sinners (that's Tamar), by faith (that's Rahab), apart from law (that's Ruth), and we can never lose it (that's Bathsheba). All praise and glory to our God and the Son of His love!

—John D. McNeil

BEATING OUT THE GRAIN

“So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned” (Ruth 2:17).

Ruth threshed the barley she had collected. Some more hard work. There are many things that cannot be purchased with money; no one else can do or make them for you. A millionaire, should he want to play the piano, has to practice the same as a pauper. This is true in spiritual life, too. Do you want to know more of God’s Word; do you want to know Christ better? Then you must work at it. First there is the laborious gleaning; then the no less strenuous beating out what you have gleaned. No one else can do it for you; you must sweat at it yourself.

Ruth beat out the grain. She did not lug all that straw home, but reduced her load to where she could carry it conveniently. Alas, many believers carry the straw home as well; in fact, many carry home nothing else but the straw. The only thing they remember about a message is something they did not agree with or did not like. I think brother Spurgeon said that some believers have less sense than a chicken. A hen will pick over a whole bushel of chaff to find one grain of wheat, while those critics will pick over a bushel of wheat to find a little bit of chaff. Listen, my brother, don’t bother about the chaff; look for the real food and enjoy it.

One may hear much, both from listening to preaching or from reading books, that is largely useless, even if true. We must reduce the bulk to the small amount of the real thing. Only when the grain is threshed can we eat it, or show it, or share it.

—Condensed from *Boaz and Ruth* by August VanRyn.

GIFTS AND THE GIVER

Gleaning in the fields of Boaz, and receiving blessings from his hand, however happy and right, will not give full rest and satisfaction to the heart of either Boaz or Ruth. Love can never be satisfied with gifts, however precious; *it must have the giver.*

Alas! how slow we are to learn that Christ, and only Christ, can satisfy our heart’s desire. At times we seek rest in our spiritual blessings. Our efforts are directed to keeping bright in our souls the joy of conversion, and the sense of the blessings we have received. But, right as it is to be in the joy of salvation, we cannot enjoy the blessings apart from the Blessor. Every blessing that we have received is set forth in Christ, and can only be enjoyed in company with Christ.

Others seek satisfaction in a busy round of service. Would that we were all busy in the Lord’s service; but if pursued with the object of finding rest, we shall only find, like Martha, that we get distracted rather than find rest. Service is good but it will not satisfy the heart.

Others seek some satisfaction in the vain things of this passing world, only to find that the more we surround ourselves with the things of earth the more we increase our cares.

Thus from one cause or another we are compelled to admit that as Christians we know little true satisfaction of heart. Saved indeed every true Christian is, but it is one thing to be saved and quite another to be satisfied. Saved by the *work* of Christ, we can only find satisfaction in the *Person* of Christ. The measure in which we are enjoying the company of Christ is the measure of our rest and satisfaction.

—From *The Book of Ruth* by Hamilton Smith.