

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Bible Families: Boaz and Ruth

I suppose everyone loves a good story, perhaps more so if it is based upon fact. We are going to consider this morning the true story of a couple who it seemed were thrown together by chance, but who grew attached to one another and ultimately married. Their names were Ruth and Boaz and their story is found in the Book of Scripture named after the former. It is a short book, five chapters only, and it begins with a famine and ends with the birth of a king. And, moreover, a king who was, humanly speaking, the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The events of which we speak took place in the days of the Judges and in Judges 21:25 we read that "in those days there was no king in Israel". In other words there was no authority in the land, for authority was vested in the king. Hence we further read that "every man did what was right in his own eyes". In that country there was a man named Elimelech, his wife was Naomi and he had two sons. Israel was a land that God had promised would flow with milk and honey and Elimelech lived in the town of Bethlehem which means 'house of bread', but sadly, and no doubt because of the wickedness of the people, God allowed a famine in the land. Of course Elimelech was affected. When there was plenty he was well content, but under pressure he subscribed to the spirit of the day and abandoned his God-appointed place, doing that which was right in his own eyes. So he leaves Bethlehem and goes to dwell in the land of Moab. This was surely a retrograde step, for we read in Deuteronomy 23:3 that "a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation, they shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever".

The book of Ruth tells what was the outcome of this step that Elimelech took. The Book of Ruth is a delightful little book, full of adventure, charm, love, romance and, above all, spirituality. The two main characters marry, have a family and no doubt it was a happy and a blessed one. We are told little of their family life, but we are told much about the character of both Ruth and Boaz and this is what we will now focus upon.

Ruth was a Moabitess, in fact she was the widow of Mahlon who was one of the sons of Elimelech. Elimelech's life in Moab was not a happy one and his emigration was certainly not successful. In fact he died it would appear soon after his arrival, and his two sons died after marrying Moabitish women. Ruth was the wife of one of them. From what is recorded of her we can deduce much about her. Firstly she had an affectionate nature. It is displayed towards her mother-in-law to whom she says, "Entreat me not to leave thee or to turn away from following after thee for where thou goest I will go." She would remind us of the woman of whom we read in Luke 7, who came to the Lord whilst he was in the house of Simon and who washed, kissed and anointed His feet. The Lord's testimony of her was that "she loved much". I think Ruth was like that. She loved much and then we find that she was content to be subject and not self assertive. She listened to and took the advice of Naomi, her mother-in-law, an older and a wiser woman. In this she certainly did not follow the spirit of her countrymen, for we read in Isaiah 16:6: "We have heard of the pride of Moab, he is very proud even of his haughtiness and his pride." Then she was a very diligent woman.

We read in Ruth 2:7 the testimony of a man who watched her at work and he said "She hath continued even from the morning until now." Not only that but she was persistent, for in verse 23 of that same chapter we read that she gleaned until the end of the barley harvest and of the wheat harvest.

Her story begins with her decision to accompany Naomi on her return to Bethlehem. After both she and her two daughters-in-law were widowed Naomi was very unhappy in Moab. I think that she realised that she had made a mistake in ever leaving her native land. Then she heard that God had favoured Israel and that there was now food available so she decides to return. When Ruth and Orpah, the widow of Naomi's other son Chilion, heard of her decision they both decide to accompany her back to Bethlehem. In Ruth 1:10 they both say, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." In other words they both make a profession, but when the time of departure arrives and the final decision has to be made, Orpah withdraws. Both of them weep, but Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns to her home in Moab. When she is put to the test her true position and state of heart is revealed. We read in Jeremiah 48:11: "Moab hath been at ease from his youth and hath settled on his lees." This is probably the reason why Elimelech had settled; life was going to be so much easier in Moab than it had been in Israel and this is where Orpah's heart lay, so she returns to her natural environment.

Dear friends, is there not a present day application of this to ourselves? How many there are who make a profession of faith with much enthusiasm and flag-waving, but when the test comes and they realise that the Christian life is not an easy one, how they hanker for the old ways and eventually return to them. Christianity with them is no more. But Ruth's profession was real. Listen to her confession, we read it Ruth 1:16. "Entreat me not to leave thee or to turn away from following after thee, for where 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. The Lord do so to me and more also if for anything but death part thee and me."

"Thy God shall be my God." Such a statement shows something far more than mere human affection for the one whom she was addressing. No doubt from Naomi herself she had heard something of the God of Israel and she wanted to follow Him. The step that she takes shows her to be a woman of faith. She was prepared to leave the ease of Moab and her Moabitish associates and align herself with a poor widow woman, a restored back-slider, for that was what Naomi really was, and with Naomi's God. So they both leave the land of Moab and arriving in Bethlehem Ruth displays further virtues, and as such she is an example to us all. She realises her responsibility towards Naomi and endeavours to do something about it.

She requests "Let me go into the field and glean." So first of all we see Ruth the gleaner. Four times in chapter 2 she is referred to as a gleaner. Little did she know then what great things God had in store for her. But this is her first approach, so to speak. A humble gleaner. As a gleaner she finds herself in the midst of abundance. We read that it was the beginning of the barley harvest. But if she is going to gather food for Naomi and herself by this means, effort and energy are necessary. And so it is with the Christian. We read that he is blessed with all spiritual blessings - Ephesians 1:3. Note that it is all, not some, all spiritual blessings. But they have to be gleaned, they have to be made good in our souls. And so Paul prays for those Ephesians to whom he was writing in Ephesians 1:17, "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." And again in Ephesians 3:16, "that He (that is God) would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man". Then she not only gleaned but we read that she beat out what she had gleaned. Proverbs 12:27 tells us, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." Ruth got the very best out of what she had gleaned.

And so it should be with us. Read the word of God, but not just in a superficial way. Meditate on it. Beat it out. Dig into it. It is the very food for your souls. You will find there is always some fresh thought that a verse of scripture, however familiar it may be, can raise in the heart. Now let us turn and consider the second character of this story. But first of all let us refer to the underlying theme of the whole book. Under the Law of God which governed Israel we find that, amongst many other things of course, there were two provisions made: the first regulated the redemption of property, and you can read of this in Leviticus 25:25-34; and the second made provision for the raising up of seed to a man who had died childless, and this is spoken of in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Elimelech had died leaving a parcel of land and both his sons had died childless. The question arises - who would redeem the land and possess the inheritance? The answer to this question is what we might call the plot of the whole story. Chapter 2 introduces the man who could step into the breach. Ruth 2:1 tells us that Elimelech had a kinsman, his name was Boaz and he was a mighty man of wealth. As we consider him we must surely come to the conclusion that he is indeed a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. His very name means 'in him is strength'. The very fact that he was a kindred of Elimelech makes us remember that Christ became a man like us, but of course apart from sin. He was a farmer and as we have already indicated it was harvest time and, without any doubt, under the hand of God this brings him and Ruth together. Ruth goes out to glean and, it says by chance, she happened to light upon a field that belonged to Boaz. Ruth may have thought that it was by chance, but as we read this story we can see how it was the hand of God that was at work. If you read through chapter 2 it is very striking to notice how often we find Ruth being in the environment of Boaz. We read of Boaz's field, where Ruth gleaned. We read of his young men who are commissioned by him to watch over her. We read of his maidens with whom she mixes. We read of his servant who reported on her to Boaz. This was the circle where Ruth was content to be.

Dear friends, there is nothing like the fellowship of the people of God. The Lord said of His disciples, "They are not of the world." Who wants the world with all its so-called attractions when we can be in the company of the people of God, like-minded with ourselves. Boaz himself, of course, was there. We read that he reached her parched corn. He instructs that handfuls on purpose should be left for her and she was not to be rebuked. But Ruth was not content with Boaz's gifts and benefits, much as she appreciated them. She desired the giver. She had learned of the inheritance. She aspired to it. And she realised that it could only be realised through Boaz. Hence in chapter 3 we learn how she takes the initiative and actively pursues it.

In Proverbs 8:17 we read these words: "I love those who love me and those who seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me. Yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and my revenue and choice of silver. I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of justice that I may cause those who love to inherit substance and I will fill their treasuries." Think of all the good things that are available to us

through Christ and His work. All the things that accompany salvation. All part of our present inheritance. Are we as assiduous as Ruth in our desire to have them or is there a lack of appreciation of what is really ours? We here find Boaz winnowing the barley that is separating the good seed from the chaff. He is a type of Christ and this action reminds us of Christ's work recorded in Ephesians 5:26-27. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to Himself, a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle."

I need hardly say that there is nothing sinister in Ruth's approach to Boaz as recorded in Ruth 3:6-7. It was no doubt a custom of the day. Her request is, "Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid." The word is really 'wing' so, as the kinsman redeemer, Ruth asks that he will take her under his wing. She had already confessed that she was but a foreigner and Boaz had on that occasion said, "It hath fully been shown me all that thou hast done for thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother and the land of thy nativity and are come unto a people whom thou knewest not heretofore." Now he says to her, "Thou art a woman of worth."

It hardly needs to be said that Christ knows all about us. Were He to comment upon us would He be able to say "Thou art a woman (or a man) of worth"? Then in chapter 4 we read the outcome of the whole affair. Boaz redeems the inheritance. He pays the full price for it. It did not make him poor. He was still a wealthy man. But of the great antitype we read in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "The Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through His poverty might be rich." The action of Boaz was a necessary step before he could take Ruth as his wife. He had given her six measures of barley, not seven, seven is the perfect number and perfection of blessing comes only with atonement. In figure Boaz had accomplished this and now Ruth becomes his wife.

Surely here we have a faint picture of the marriage of the Lamb of which we read in Revelation 19. Boaz is the Lord Jesus, Ruth is the Church the Bride. And you and I, believers in Him, are encompassed in that number. Nothing is said of their life together, but what is said of them individually, their spirituality and desire to do the will of God, must have ensured that it was indeed a very blessed one. Like all good stories I think we can conclude that they lived happily ever after. We do read that they had a son, their first child Obed. He was the grandfather of David, King of Israel, and type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings.

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