

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. Jonathan Hughes

Choices: Choosing to do things the right way - Ruth 4

Just recently reality TV seems to have taken a bit of a knock. You may remember one particular series a few years ago now, where the contestants entered the show to find a prospective partner. The show ended by the two winners getting married. To many, the show was a step too far, cheapening what is supposed to be a serious life-long commitment. Many column inches in the letters page paid testimony to the fact that marriage is still a hugely popular institution. Although the above mentioned show may not be the ideal way to go about finding a partner for life, it is remarkable hearing about the many different ways in which seemingly happily married couples first met. After an accident, over the internet, at work or sheltering from a storm are just some of the “first meetings” I can think of, and no doubt, you could think of many more unusual circumstances. However, as we come to today’s chapter at the end of the book of Ruth, few modern day romances can have begun in quite the same bizarre way that we read about in chapter 4. We will conclude our look at the choices real men and women of God have made, by looking at the subject of choosing to do things the right way, i.e. according to God’s word.

As we work our way through the chapter, we will look at a series of six “p’s” before thinking about some of the consequences for us today.

- The Proposal
- The Problem
- The Preparation
- The Potential
- The Provision
- The Prospect

The Proposal

“Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, ‘Come aside, friend, sit down here.’ So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down. Then he said to the close relative, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. And I thought to inform you, saying, “Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.”’ And he said, ‘I will redeem it’” (verses 1-4).

As we saw last week in chapter 3, Boaz and Ruth had met and fallen in love. Boaz had told Ruth that he would do everything necessary so that they could be married. A dishonest man, or a lazy man, might just have got married straight away, calling it providence that they had met, justifying his actions by saying that God had brought Ruth along and it all seemed so easily to fall into place. Yet Boaz was a man who knew his Bible. In Leviticus 25:23-28 and 47-49, God had made provision for the way the land was to be kept within the families of Israel. The closest relative of Elimelech had the first refusal to redeem – to recover ownership by paying a price – the land left vacant. In such a way the whole of the land God had given to Israel would always be tended for, and remain productive under the ownership of the Israelites. It is always a good thing when we rightly value the spiritual inheritance we have as Christians today, not allowing it to become rusty or obsolete. I am quite convinced that Boaz knew that it was right for him and Ruth to marry, and so for him to take possession of the land under question. He was content to pursue the matter properly, and trust God for the future, because he had known His work in the past. Whenever we face the really big decisions in life and are unsure as to the way that God would have us go, it is always a good thing if we have a solid “track record” of His leading us in the past to fall back on. Those large leaps of faith become small steps of trust, when we know the assurance of His guidance in our lives. However, Boaz’ faith must have been sorely tested as the closer relative confirmed that he was ready to redeem the land for himself.

The Problem

“Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance.’ And the close relative said, ‘I cannot

redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it” (verses 5-6). Again Boaz knew the law. Deuteronomy 25:5-10, made provision for childless widows. The deal was to buy the land and raise a family with Ruth. What might seem to us like a massive gamble, and maybe at the time, caused Boaz’ heart to race, was only to serve to prove that when Boaz relied on the word of God, God would so order things for good.

All could have gone disastrously wrong as Boaz lost the land and more importantly to his heart and future happiness, Ruth. We ought also to note the godly courage of Ruth too. After all it was her life, her future that was being discussed without her having a say in matters. What these two individuals teach us is that when we know that God’s will for our lives is best, and that His will is expressed in His word, we don’t need to have our say in matters. As far as Boaz was concerned, there was no risk at all in doing things properly, rather than rushing through a wedding on the sly. In a wonderful example to us today, they make even the powerful emotions of love and desire subject to the word of God. And it is wonderful to see that, when a couple, or when we as individuals today, so wholly sacrifice our will, making it subject to His will, He orders all events perfectly. The outcome could not have been more to Boaz and Ruth’s pleasing had they asserted their own will. For the close relative was not prepared to take Ruth as his wife, and so leaves Boaz with a free hand and a full heart.

The Preparation

“Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything; one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel. Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, ‘Buy it for yourself.’ So he took off his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day” (verses 7-10).

Before all the witnesses that Boaz had gathered together, he makes a clear statement of his intent. He was going to buy the land to preserve the inheritance and acquire Ruth to raise an heir. One can imagine the unfettered delight that filled his heart as he declared his intentions. Interestingly in chapter 2, verse 1, Boaz is described as a man of great wealth. God had prepared Boaz for just such a day as this. Very often God will start to act many years in advance of His plans coming to fruition. We can be very impatient, wanting to understand everything now and to have all come to fruition now.

Perhaps Boaz had wondered in his heart why God had so prospered him, yet he remained without an heir to pass on his inheritance. How marvellously he would now be able to trace the hand of God working in his life over many years, leading up to his complete contentment. God is no man’s debtor. If we try to run our own lives for our benefit, we will only beggar ourselves in the long run. As we increasingly hand over every aspect of our lives to His control, we will find that He is able to work all things for His glory and our good. The challenge that Boaz and Ruth leave us in our generation is the same one that they faced. Are we prepared to let God take control of our money, our relationships, our work lives – in fact, every area of our lives, for Him to do as He chooses. Where He has revealed His intentions in His word, are we prepared to humbly accept the plain statements of Scripture and apply them to our lives, often at some personal cost, knowing that in doing so, His best for our lives will be achieved.

The Potential

“And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman” (verses 11-12).

Having settled things properly, Boaz can happily receive the warm wishes of the witnesses for his relationship with Ruth. Imagine for a moment what would have been said had he just surreptitiously married Ruth in haste. How tongues would have wagged with scandalised gossip. Now, instead, those same tongues can generously offer the wishes of prosperity for a useful family life. What a boon it would be for Boaz and Ruth to be as blessed as Jacob and Rachel or Leah had been, or that Judah and Tamar had been. Little could they have realised how magnificently God would answer their prayers, as we shall see later. It may not always be the case, but more often than not, when we choose to do things according to His word, God honours that faith and our lives here and now are the better for it. Such was to be the case with Boaz and Ruth.

The Provision

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age: for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.’ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbour women gave him a name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi.’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (verses 13-17).

We see now the outcome of the faithfulness of this couple. What a change was to occur in the lives of all concerned. For 10 years Ruth had remained childless in Moab, and yet here in Bethlehem, married to Boaz, she conceives and gives birth to a son. Naomi had returned to Bethlehem, but had come back bitter, widowed and depressed. Now she is the nurse to young Obed, a grandmother, able to pass on to him all the wisdom of a lifetime of experience. Sadly today, with so many families fractured, grandparents do not get the chance to perform such an invaluable service. It comes as no surprise when we see so many youngsters then getting into trouble of one sort or another. The name Obed means ‘worshipped’. There can be little doubt that his birth was the cause of much worship in the lives of Boaz, Ruth and Naomi. The line of inheritance was secure. The land that God had given to the family of Elimelech was now safe and productive and the future, that had looked so bleak as Naomi and Ruth had returned to Bethlehem, and that had consisted of gleaning throughout the harvest, now looked bright. How wonderful is the God who delights to bless and reward any signs of faithfulness in His children!

The Prospect

“Now this is the genealogy of Perez; Perez begot Hezron; Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon; Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David” (verses 18-22).

The one who was the cause for worship (Obed) was the father of ‘the possessor’ (Jesse) who was the father of ‘the beloved’ (David), arguably Israel’s greatest earthly king. Who would ever have imagined that a foreign woman would be a part of the genealogy of the royal line of Israel? And yet the blessing goes far beyond earthly royalty. For in the fullness of time, to David’s line would be born the King of kings, Jesus Christ Himself. All the blessing that has resulted from the completed work at Calvary, yours and my salvation and the eternal glory that will result to God, has in part, its roots in the story of Boaz and Ruth. One can only imagine how different things would have been had Boaz and Ruth not chosen to do things according to God’s word. Their choice, made in the midst of the passion of love, was to have far reaching consequences.

Throughout the events of chapter 4, we have seen how two ordinary people, so much in love, decided to do things according to the word of God. A quicker, and more simple cause of action might have involved them marrying in haste. Yet, they knew that the only true path to lasting blessing lay in obedience to God’s word and so they chose the harder path. That choice was to be vindicated in their lifetime and throughout eternity. The question for us today is a simple one. What does all this have to say to us in our generation? Doubtless the rules and regulations that governed the choices of Boaz and Ruth sound very strange to us today. However the underlying principles that guided Boaz and Ruth are every bit as relevant today.

In November 1527 Desiderius Erasmus, a leading Christian humanist scholar wrote to one of the early reformers, explaining why he would not join their church. “I have always condemned the venom of the leaders, but they are egged on by the actions of certain people. In actual fact, if you were what you brag of being, they would have set an example of godly and patient conduct which would have made the gospel widely acceptable.” These damning words bear testimony to how, throughout history, those who call themselves Christian, have utterly failed to live their lives by the principles that guided Boaz and Ruth. Time does not allow us to outline all that the Bible has to teach us as regards our belief and behaviour in our generation. It would also be quite inappropriate for me to do so for inevitably, it would be coloured by my own personal prejudices. What we all really need to understand this morning, and put into practice every day of our lives, is to read and practice what the Bible has to say to us.

The great cry of the reformation “*Sola Scriptura*” – the scriptures only – needs to be taken up again. It is a solemn thing to realise that in previous generations, our brothers and sisters in Christ faced martyrdom for this very cause. We need to get into the habit of conscientiously and regularly reading the Bible with a view to letting it change our behaviour. Unless we read the Bible how can we know what it has to say? It is not what the church teaches but what the Bible teaches that should be the guide for life, for sometimes the church will get it wrong. The Holy Spirit will always guide us into all truth, if our minds and lives are genuinely open to His leading.

I recall a sorry conversation I heard about with an evangelical believer, who said that he could see certain patterns of behaviour laid out in the epistles, that were clear to understand, but would be impossible for him to put into practice in his church set up. That is just not acceptable. If we are to live a life of obedience to God, and to what He has revealed in His word, then we must be prepared to make hard choices and do what He says. Just imagine for a moment if all Christians did exactly this. What a powerful testimony it would have to the world! It is not to say that we would all be exactly the same. Scripture is not so proscriptive as to allow only one interpretation on all matters. Where it is not, we must not elevate church traditions to have the same authority as the word of God.

We need to recognise that there will be genuinely different practices that can be fully consistent with what the Bible teaches. However, where clear and plain teaching is given, teaching that does not and will not change with the vagaries of secular society, then if we want fellowship with God, we have no option but to obey. Boaz knew what the law required in terms of marriage to Ruth. He would not let his natural feelings for her come before what God had said. How hard that must have been for him! And yet, as we have seen, his obedience to God's word not only caused him no loss, but in fact proved to be the springboard for much blessing. We need just such an attitude today. In our personal lives as individuals, as well as in our church life together, we need to live in accordance to His word. It is the only path to true blessing.

The chorus to John Henry Sammis' hymn "When we walk with the Lord" has some challenging words:

*"Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey."*

As we draw our studies of the life of Ruth to a close this morning, let us meet the challenge that this lady of God leaves us. Let us be ready to choose to follow God – wherever He may lead. Let us be ready to serve God – wherever He may place us and whatever He may ask us to do. Let us choose our friends, particularly our spouses wisely – whoever that may prove to be. Finally, let us choose to do things according to His word. From utter obscurity in Moab the choices that Ruth made led her to fame and blessing within the nation of Israel and to blessing in the presence of God. How marvellous a thing it would be if the choices that we make, be they large or small, were to lead us on the pathway of similar blessing!

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