

Ruth

Lesson Four – Ruth's Marital Joy

"Ruth the Moabitess... I have acquired as my wife" (4:10)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past three weeks we've been looking at one of the most beautiful love stories in the Old Testament – the story of Ruth.
 - A. The story began in chapter one when a Jewish man by the name of Elimelech who, while living in the neighboring land of Moab, suddenly died, leaving behind his widow Naomi and their two sons.
 1. In time, Naomi's sons married Moabite women, but soon after, they also died.
 2. Since Naomi was now all alone with her two widowed daughter's-in-law, she decided to return to her homeland in Bethlehem.
 - a. Although Naomi urged the young women to return to the own homeland to find husbands from among their own people, Ruth pleaded with Naomi to be permitted to remain with her.
 - B. In the second chapter, we see God providentially blessing Ruth for her great love and devotion toward her mother-in-law.
 1. Ruth was not the kind of person to ask for charity as a young widow, and so she asks Naomi's permission to go into the fields and glean the barley sheaves.
 - a. The Old Testament Law of Moses required all landowners to allow widows, the fatherless and strangers of the land to glean the fields – meaning they were permitted to gather up whatever remained in the fields after the reapers had gone through harvesting the crop. **(Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22)**

2. While Ruth is busy gleaning, the owner of the field arrived – a man by the name of Boaz.
 - a. Unknown to Ruth, Boaz was related to her mother-in-law Naomi. And when he learned that the woman who was gleaning his fields was the young Moabite woman caring for Naomi, he took a special interest in her.
 - b. He not only urges Ruth to continue gleaning in his field until the end of harvest, he even asked his servants to intentionally drop sheaves of barley for Ruth to gather up and keep.
 3. When Ruth returned home and told Naomi about her good fortune, it's only then that the women learn Ruth had been gleaning in the field of Boaz – a close relative to Naomi.
 - a. Naomi clearly saw this as God's providential blessing.
- C. Chapter three begins with Naomi showing concern for Ruth's future.
1. By this time Naomi and Ruth were more like mother and daughter than mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and so Naomi plays match-maker by coming up with a plan to help Ruth find a suitable husband.
 - a. Naomi didn't see Boaz as simply a close relative, she also saw him as an honorable and generous man of great integrity – a man whom **many** apparently looked up to with great respect.
 - b. And since the Law of Moses required the next-of-kin to take a young widow with no children to be their own wife; and since Boaz was closely related to both Naomi and Ruth; Naomi could see that Boaz would be a perfect husband for Ruth – a young woman who also was known for her dignity, virtue and respect.

2. Naomi instructed Ruth to go to the thrashing floor in the evening where the reapers had been thrashing the grain during the day, and wait until Boaz retires for the evening and falls asleep before going to him and laying down at his feet.
 - a. When he awakens to find Ruth at his feet, she was instructed to ask him to take her under his protection – which was another way of asking that he not only become her legal guardian and protector, but also her husband.
 3. When Boaz awoke and found Ruth there, and heard her request, he was deeply moved and greatly honored – she could have chosen a younger man of wealth, but chose him instead.
 - a. Boaz tells Ruth there is another man who is a closer relation than he, but if that man doesn't agree to accept her request, Boaz will be most honored to become her husband.
- D. Throughout this story, the generous, caring and godly character of Boaz is seen over and over.
1. He is a kind man with a strong sense of moral integrity – there is certainly not even a HINT of immorality in the relationship between Boaz and Ruth.
 2. He is also a hospitable and generous man with a strong concern for duty and reputation.
 3. And finally, he is a man, as Naomi knew, who *"will not rest until he has concluded the matter [of Ruth's gracious request] this day."*
(Ruth 3:18)

BODY:

- I. As we come to the final chapter of this wonderful little book, we see how Boaz fulfills Ruth's marital joy by becoming her husband.

- A. The story begins by Boaz meeting with the “close relative” who would have been next-of-kin to Ruth’s deceased husband, as well as being next-of-kin to her mother-in-law, Naomi.
1. They meet at the gates of the city of Bethlehem. The gates to a city were where business transactions were commonly made, and where the elders of the city would meet to discuss local issues.
 - a. Meeting at the gates of a city to discuss business and political issues was a practice that went back thousands of years, even before the days of Abraham.
 2. In addition to meeting with the next-of-kin, Boaz also requested ten men from among the elders of the city to meet with them to serve as witnesses to the business proposal Boaz was about to make.
 3. Boaz now explains to the next-of-kin the purpose for this meeting.
 - a. **Ruth 4:3-4** – *"Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 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.'"*
 - b. At first Naomi’s next-of-kin was more than willing to redeem the land. He undoubtedly saw this as a financial advantage to him – an opportunity to add to his property holdings and produce an even bigger crop.
 4. However, there was a catch. Boaz added: **Ruth 4:5** – *"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."

a. The young man's response was quick: **Ruth 4:6** – *"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."*

- B. To help us better understand the complexities of this proposal we need to understand something about Jewish law.
1. According to Jewish law, property could be bought and sold under most circumstances with no legal entanglements or restrictions.
 - a. However, land that was transferred to another because of poverty was treated entirely different.
 2. Most commentators understand that Naomi actually **mortgaged** a piece of land belonging to her deceased husband, Elimelech, upon her return to Israel. She apparently did this in order to provide for her own financial needs as well as for those of Ruth.
 - a. Rather than sell the land outright, Naomi would have only **borrowed** against its value and would have given the person who loaned the money legal right to the land and all the crops produced on it.
 - b. Keep in mind that Naomi would have only been selling the legal right for some person to USE the land and keep all crops produced on it. The actual TITLE to the land would have still belonged to Naomi and her family as an inheritance.
 - c. The reason land in cases of poverty were not considered as legally sold is because the Law of Moses required that land mortgaged in these cases must be returned to the title holder in the year of Jubilee (which came once every fifty years)

when all debts throughout the land of Israel were erased and all property held as security for debts had to be returned.

(1). So think of it as Naomi actually **leasing** the property to some person for however many years there were until Jubilee, and receiving the lease in a lump sum rather than being paid out over several months or years.

- d. However, according to **Leviticus 25:25-28** it was possible for land mortgaged (or leased) in this manner to be redeemed or purchased back by the legal heirs of the property. They would simply calculate the number of years remaining until Jubilee and pay that percentage of the original price to the present land holder.
2. This is what Boaz was asking Naomi's next-of-kin to do.
 - a. By redeeming or purchasing back the land, Naomi would be able to keep the money she received, but the legal title of the land would now be transferred to Naomi's next-of-kin and thus remain in the family as an inheritance.
 - b. This young man was able to quickly calculate the value of the land and the crop it would produce against the money needed to purchase it back, and probably would have seen it as a great financial advantage to him.
 - c. So he was very eager to accept the offer UNTIL Boaz added one more requirement.
 3. Since Naomi was a widow who had raised up sons (even though they were dead), the Law of Moses would **NOT** have required this next-of-kin to marry her at the time he redeemed her husband's land.

- a. However, Naomi wasn't the only person who had legal title to that piece of land – Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, who was also a widow, would have legal title to the land upon Naomi's death.
 - b. Without going into all the legal details of this matter, let me simplify it by saying that while the next-of-kin would not be required to marry Naomi when redeeming her debt, he **WOULD** be legally required to marry Ruth.
4. And so, with this added requirement, the next-of-kin declined the offer, saying, *"I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance."* **(v. 6a)**
- a. Some commentators feel he may have already had a wife and children through her, and that by marrying Ruth and having children by her in the name of her deceased husband would have diluted his future inheritance to his own children.
 - b. Others suggest he may have felt marrying a widowed Moabite woman, who was living in poverty, would have damaged his reputation and status among his relations and would have tainted his own pure bloodline.
 - c. However, the best explanation seems to be that to redeem the property and marry Ruth would require him to spend his own inheritance to purchase property that would eventually go to children he would have through Ruth, but who would be born and raised in the name her deceased husband. And so, out of selfish interests, he declined the offer.
5. With his refusal to redeem the property and marry Ruth, the door was now open for Boaz to honor the request of this lovely young Moabite widow.

- a. So, the next of kin removed his own sandal, and would have given it to Boaz as a customary way of sealing the agreement between them to allow Boaz to redeem the land and marry Ruth.
 - b. **Ruth 4:9-10** – *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. 10 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."*
6. Finally, we're told that all those present at the gate of the city – which included ten of the elders of the city and those who were there to overhear this transaction – all gave Boaz their blessings and called upon God to richly bless this honorable and noble man with prosperity and fame in Bethlehem.
- II. Like most stories we grew up hearing as little children, this story has a very happy ending.
- A. Through the providence of God, a generous man of great honor and integrity, and a faithful woman of great kindness and virtue, are brought together to eventually become husband and wife.
 1. But this isn't just a happy ending for Ruth and Boaz it's also a happy ending for Naomi.
 - a. **Ruth 4:13-17** – *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. 14 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! 15 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." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. 17 Also the neighbor 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.

- B. There are some things the author of Ruth records here that we don't want to rush through and accidentally overlook – they are all very significant.
1. First, we're told in **verse 13**, *"the LORD gave her [Ruth] conception, and she bore a son."*
 - a. Since fertility was often viewed by ancient people's as God showing His blessing upon a woman, it is suggested by some commentators that mention here of the LORD giving Ruth *"conception"* meant God not only **accepted** and **blessed** the union of Ruth and Boaz, but also accepted and blessed Ruth for the kind, loving, and virtuous woman that she was.
 2. Second, the blessings pronounced by the women are also very significant.
 - a. If you remember, when Naomi's husband and her two sons died in the land of Moab, she return to Bethlehem with her daughters-in-law having lost everything.
 - (1). **Ruth 1:19-21** – *And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them;*

and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

- b. But now, the women wanted Naomi to know that the Lord was **not** against her, **nor** had He afflicted her.
 - c. Rather, the LORD had providentially provided Naomi with a close relative who would marry her beloved daughter-in-law and would raise children in the name of Naomi's deceased son.
 - d. The women could see that Naomi's grandson would become, *"a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age."*
3. Third, the women also gave Ruth's newborn son his name – Obed.
- a. The name Obed means, "a servant," or "a worshipping servant."
 - b. In other words, the women could see this is exactly what Obed would become to Naomi – he would grow up loving his grandmother, and would care for her all the days of her life.
 - c. The lives Naomi lost in the death of her husband and her two sons were now being replaced with the birth of her grandson – who was truly a gift from God.
4. And finally, in a moment of great tenderness and loving affection, we're told, *"Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him."* **(Ruth 4:16)**

CONCLUSION:

- I. As we bring this study of Ruth to a close, what can we learn from all we've seen? At the very beginning of our study we mentioned that the book of Ruth serves to illustrate several things.
 - A. From the first chapter we learned that there are always consequences associated with the choices we make in life.
 1. It appeared that Elimelech made a wrong choice in moving his family to Moab.
 - a. Naomi also seems to have made an unwise choice in choosing to remain in Moab following the death of her husband.
 - b. It was sometime after the death of her husband that Naomi's two sons made what may have been an unwise choice in marrying women of Moab – they both died soon after.
 - c. And so we learned that there are sometimes very unpleasant consequences associated with making choices that are motivated more out of selfish interests than they are out of serving the Lord.
 2. But even then, God has a way of taking wrong and unwise choices and eventually turning them into blessings.
 - a. If Elimelech had not chosen to move his family to Moab, and if Naomi had not chosen to remain there long enough for her sons to marry Moabite women, Ruth would have never come into Naomi's life.
 3. God is still the Master of taking the wrong and unwise choices we've made in the past and turning them into future blessings.
 - a. I'm a strong believer in the providence of God – of God working in our lives in ways we may never see or even

completely understand to bring about blessings to those who faithfully serve Him.

- b. If it hasn't happened to you already, perhaps some day you will be able to look back over your life and see where God turned tragedy into victory in ways you could have never imagined.
- c. **Rom 8:28** – *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

B. In chapter two of the book of Ruth we learned several things.

- 1. First we learned that God always honors a gentle and quiet spirit that displays itself in genuine humility.
 - a. Ruth was a gentle and quiet spirit **personified** – that's why God blessed Ruth by providentially leading her to the man who would soon become her husband.
- 2. We also learned that God rewards those who care for the needs of others.
 - a. Although she was under no obligation to care for her mother-in-law, Ruth's godly character and her compassionate heart led her to treat Naomi more like a mother than a mother-in-law.
 - b. And so, God blessed Ruth for her tender and compassionate care of Naomi.
- 3. Third, we learned the value of a good days work and of earning our own way through life.
 - a. The Scriptures are filled with admonitions against laziness and against failing to provide for one's family when we have the ability and the health to do so.

- b. Even though Ruth was a poor widow herself, she wasn't the kind to ask for charity – especially since she had the ability and the opportunity to work in the fields, gleaning enough of the crop to take care of her own needs plus those of Naomi.
 - 4. Finally, in chapter two, we learned the need to maintain our moral integrity.
 - a. Boaz conducted himself with utmost dignity and respect toward this young Moabite woman.
 - b. He was very careful to maintain his own moral integrity and to do nothing that would jeopardize her virtue.
 - c. Likewise, we need to always conduct ourselves with utmost dignity and respect toward each other – that's the kind of character God blesses.
- C. In chapter three we also learned a few valuable lessons.
 - 1. First we saw the wisdom of Naomi becoming involved in helping find a suitable husband for her beloved daughter-in-law Ruth.
 - a. While arranged marriages are not a part of our culture, a young man or young woman would be wise to listen to the advice of their parents when it comes to choosing someone to date, and especially someone to eventually marry.
 - 2. Second, we learned the importance of looking beyond the surface and looking deep into the internal qualities and character of someone we may take a special interest in.
 - a. While Ruth may have been an attractive young woman, Boaz looked beyond all that and saw all the godly characteristics of a virtuous woman.

- b. And while Ruth could have married a younger man of wealth, she saw in Boaz all the godly characteristics of a generous, compassionate, morally upright man of great integrity.
 - c. The **external** beauty will someday fade away, but the **internal** character of a godly man or woman need never change. It never grows old with time, and always remains fresh and beautiful.
3. And finally in chapter three we saw the character of a virtuous wife.
- a. The words of Solomon in **Proverbs 31:10-19** could just as easily have been written about Ruth as anyone else.
 - b. The virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31 is the kind of woman every young lady should ascribe to become in her own life.
 - c. And it's the kind of woman every young man should seek in a wife someday.
- C. So, what can we learn from this **final chapter** of the book of Ruth?
- 1. Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn is that God will always sanctify and bless the marriage of a godly man and woman who live their lives serving the Lord and serving others.
 - a. A marriage is the joining of a man and a woman so that they become so intimately and emotionally or spiritually bound to one another that they can be spoken of as being "one flesh."
 - b. Unfortunately, this kind of close intimate and emotional (or spiritual) bond doesn't always occur when a man and a woman marry.
 - 2. We live in a society that is more focused on the "ME" of a marriage than the "WE."

- a. In other words, far too many couples enter the marriage relationship where one or both are more concerned about what they are going to GET OUT of the marriage than with what they are going to PUT INTO the marriage.
 - b. And when one person isn't getting OUT OF the marriage what they think they deserve, it's not at all uncommon for them to begin searching for someone else to fulfill those expectations or needs.
 - c. And simply because one or both of the parties in the marriage are Christians doesn't guarantee the marriage will succeed.
 - (1). Hosea is a good example of a faithful god-fearing man who married a woman of Israel whose heart was polluted by the worldliness around her.
 - (2). Whether or not he was aware of that before he married her is not clear. But it certainly didn't take long for him to realize that he wasn't the father of all their children.
 - (3). She finally abandoned her faithful, loving husband to pursue her lovers – and in the end she gave up everything and gained nothing in return.
3. When we look at the lives of Ruth and Boaz, we see two very godly people who are both **givers**.
- a. Both had a long history of being self-sacrificing and of giving to others. Both were generous, kind, caring and loving.
 - b. It's no wonder that God brought them together and blessed their marriage.

II. Do you remember the two passages we quoted at the beginning of this series from the book of Judges?

- A. In the introduction to this series, we said the story we are about to read takes place in a time of Israel's history before there was a king, and when:
1. "... everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (**Judges 17:6; 21:25**)
 2. And yet, in one of Israel's darkest periods of history, the lives of two women and one man shine forth as a ray of hope.
 - a. The light of a life characterized by generosity, kindness, self-sacrifice, virtue and moral integrity can never be darkened, even in the worst of moral conditions.
 - b. These three amazing characters did what was right in God's eyes, and served as an example to those around them.
- B. Are you doing what is right in God's eyes, or what is right in your own eyes?
1. If your life has been characterized by living it in such a way to please YOU, then you've been living a selfish, self-centered and certainly NOT a Christ-like life.
 - a. Sadly, those who live their whole lives just to please themselves eventually come face to face with the reality that their lives are empty and void of any real meaning or purpose.
 - b. Real joy comes from serving others and from giving to others.
 2. Without question, the greatest example of giving and self-sacrifice is that of Jesus who gave His life so that YOU could have the hope of eternal life in heaven.
 - a. If you've been selfishly living just to please yourself, and you're beginning to see how void and empty your life is, you can begin now to change all that.