

## INTRODUCTION

This is message #5 in a series I'm calling "Ruth: The Romance of Redemption." The title of this message is "A Match Made in Heaven."

We've come to the climax of the story as Ruth and Boaz finally get together. As we talk about their love story, don't forget that this is also a picture of the love story between Jesus and His church. Before we get into the details of Chapter 3, I want to back up and give an overview of the entire book. So here's my 100-second synopsis of Ruth:

Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale. A tale of a fateful trip; that started when a family moved; and their faith began to slip. The Father's name was Elimelech, Naomi was his wife; and with two sons in Moab there; they found a bitter life. The three men died, and life was rough; Naomi's dreams were tossed; If not for the courage of Ruth to stay; Naomi's hope was lost; ... After three funerals, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She urged the two younger widows to stay in Moab. Orpah stayed, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi and traveled with her back to Bethlehem. They arrived with nothing and had to beg for food. Ruth went into the field of a farmer named Boaz to pick up leftover grain from the harvest. Boaz was so impressed with young Ruth that he instructed his workers to leave extra grain for her to gather each day. Naomi realized that Boaz was a relative of her dead husband, which qualified him to be a Kinsman-Redeemer. If Ruth married Boaz, they could legally reclaim the land that formerly belonged to Naomi's husband. So Naomi used her matchmaking skills. Following Naomi's advice, Ruth humbly asked Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer. In other words, Ruth basically asked Boaz to marry her! And Boaz said, "Yes ma'am!" But there was a problem—there was another relative who was closer and he had the first right to redeem the land. This relative wanted the property, but when he learned that a bride came with the deal, he said, "No thanks!" This allowed Boaz to marry Ruth and redeem the family's land and reputation.

They were married and God blessed them with son named Obed, who turned out to be the grandfather of none other than King David himself! God redeemed Ruth's life from being a poor, lonely widow into one of the human ancestors of Jesus with her own book in the Bible. It's also a parable about how God lovingly redeems us.

In Chapter 3 contains the story of how Ruth and Boaz got engaged. Of course, you know how it happened. Ruth was lonely so she logged into eharmony.com and filled out her profile to find someone who was compatible with her...Not! In fact, if eHarmony had existed back then, there's no way they would have been matched. Boaz was much older; he was wealthy; she was a beggar; he was an Israelite with a pedigree; she was an immigrant with no standing.

Actually, as I thought about this, eHarmony is okay, but there is a better way to find your mate. I call it gHarmony.complete. If you want a mate, ask God. And the good thing about asking God for help is that it's FREE!

Ruth and Boaz have a midnight rendezvous at the threshing floor. It's the moment we've been waiting for. As we dive into this great story, I want to mention four main characters in this chapter and how they teach us lessons from "the night at the threshing floor."

## 1. NAOMI'S HOPE: She emerged from bitterness when she put Ruth's needs first

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem she was a bitter woman. She said, "Don't call me Naomi (which means "pleasant"). Instead, call me Mara (which means "bitter") because the Lord has made my life very bitter." But beginning in Chapter 3:1, we see a change in her attitude. "One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'" (Ruth 3:1-4)

In the chapter 2 Naomi is almost reclusive. Instead of going out and gathering leftover grain with Ruth, she stays at home. We don't know if health or old age prevented her from going, but she might have just been pouting. It's easy to become bitter when all you think about is "little old me." But a change occurred in Naomi's attitude when she started thinking about finding Ruth a husband. For the first time, she has a plan, she has hope. Bitterness and hope are mutually exclusive. They can't both exist at the same time in your heart. Maybe you should try that. Try taking your eyes off your own problems and start trying to help other people in need. That's a great cure for bitterness.

### Our lesson: We should make creative plans to follow God's will

When I come to this section of Ruth I feel like singing that song from Fiddler on the Roof, "Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match; find me a find; catch me a catch!" Naomi hatched a plan to have Ruth confront Boaz all alone at the threshing floor. She said, "Girl, take a bath, use some perfume and put on your best dress. You go pop the question. Don't let him get away!" Her plan was bold and risky, but it worked!

So, was Naomi showing a lack of faith by formulating a plan to *make* it happen? That's a question that still needs answering today. How much "help" does God need in accomplishing His will?

There are two extremes when it comes to understanding God's involvement in our lives. On one side, you have Deism. That's the belief in a "watchmaker god." This view of God asserts that He created the world like a watchmaker who made the watch and then wound it up and he lets it run by itself. In Deism, God isn't involved in our lives, so if we want something to happen, we've got to make it happen. Of course, that's wrong.

The other extreme is fatalism. That's the belief that everything that happens is already predetermined; we have no control over what happens. If something is destined to happen, it will happen regardless of what we do. There was an old Quaker who held this view that everything that happened was predetermined. One day as he was walking down his cellar stairs, he tripped and tumbled all the way to the bottom. He stood up and said, "Well, I'm glad that's over with!"

As is often the case, the truth lies somewhere between those extremes. God is interested in every part of our lives. He has the hairs of our head numbered. And neither are we victims of blind fate. We aren't pawns on God's chessboard that He moves at will. We are responsible human beings, and we have a part in making God's Will come about.

Like Naomi, we should be making bold plans within God's will. For instance, it's God will for everyone to put their faith in Jesus. But that's not going to happen unless we make some plans and carry out some creative actions to make that happen. That's why we share our faith. Naomi came up with a bold plan to introduce Ruth to her redeemer. When was the last time you thought creatively about how you can introduce those people you love to their Redeemer?

## **2. RUTH'S FAITH: She risked failure to ask Boaz to be her husband and redeemer**

If Naomi was characterized by hope, Ruth demonstrated faith. It took a lot of faith to follow Naomi's bold plan. Let's read about this midnight rendezvous in Ruth 3:5-8: "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer [goel]."

Good for you, Ruth! The first thing I notice is her obedience. She told Naomi, "I will do whatever you say." That's what faith is; it believing God enough to DO what He tells us to do in His Word. She didn't just believe there was a possibility that Boaz could be her goel; she believed enough to DO something about it! You can say you believe God's Word until you're blue in the face, but the only part of this Bible you really believe is that part you act on.

The threshing floor was usually a rock floor enclosed by a circular arrangement of stones. It would be located on top of a hill to catch the breeze. The grain stalks would be piled there and men and animals would tread on the stalks to separate the kernel from the stalk. Then they would use a wooden winnowing fork to toss the kernels up into the air. The breeze would blow away the lighter husks, or chaff, and the heavier grain would fall to the earth. This threshed grain represented the wealth of a farmer, so during this time, the owner would sleep at the threshing floor to guard his valuable treasure of grain.

Can't you picture Ruth as she slips toward the threshing floor? She watches where Boaz lies down and waits. When she is sure he is asleep, she creeps up and takes his cloak, which is covering his legs, and folds up the cloak until his feet are exposed. Then she lies down at his feet and waits. When Boaz wakes up, she proposes marriage to Boaz.

If it didn't sound like a marriage proposal to you, that's because you don't have a Jewish background. The phrase, "spread the cover of your garment over me" was a reference to a wedding ceremony. Even to this day, at Jewish weddings the groom will cover his bride with a

silk or linen cloth. More modern Jewish weddings have put the cloth over the couple as a canopy but the symbolism is the same of being covered.

### **Our lesson: We should take bold steps in trusting God**

When God tells you to do something in His Word do you say, "I'll do it?" Sometimes we overanalyze God's Word and we suffer from the paralysis of analysis. We have a failure to launch.

There's an old Chinese fable about over analyzing a situation. It translates into English this way: Once upon a time a mother duck was teaching her ducklings to walk. One of her ducklings couldn't figure it. She said, "But mama, do I start with my left foot or my right foot?" The mother duck said, "Hush! And just walk!"

When it comes to trusting and obeying God, the Nike slogan comes to mind: Just do it. Some Christians never experience God's best because they spend all of their lives sitting around waiting for God to give them more information before they launch out. It's possible to be so afraid of making mistakes that we do nothing. But when you read clear directions from God in His Word, the Bible, He has already given you permission to launch out.

Trusting God is like surfing. If you want to surf, you need to buy the right equipment, get trained, and go to the beach. But you can't make the wave, only God can do that. But you've got to swim out and ride the wave. In *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby says you don't have to look around and wonder what God's will is. Just look to see where God is working, and join Him. Too many Christians are obsessed with, "How can I build a wave?" You don't have to wring your hands and try to find something to do for God. Look around you. God is up to a lot of great things! Join Him! Surf's up!

### **3. BOAZ'S LOVE: He rewarded her faith with his offer of protection and provision**

We've seen Naomi's hope, and Ruth's faith, and now let's look at Boaz's love. The Bible says, "These three remain, faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love." Let's read Ruth 3:10-18: "The Lord bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning." So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

Now you would expect me to tell you that "uncovering the feet" was some ancient custom that prospective wives practiced. I hate to disappoint you but I think the reason Naomi told Ruth to uncover his feet was so he would wake up when his feet got cold. After all, Boaz wouldn't be the first man to get cold feet! But in this case, cold feet led to a wedding!

Now if you have an inquisitive mind, you've been wondering about what really happened that night. If this had been a modern movie, we know what would have happened. So naturally, you're wondering, "Was there any hanky-panky going on? To answer that I don't want to just give you my opinion, I want to read a quote from a respected Old Testament scholar. Dr. F.B. Huey, who writes: "Those who interpret a sexual relation in this encounter reflect their 20<sup>th</sup> century view of sexual permissiveness. They fail to appreciate the cultural taboos of Ruth's time that would have prevented a man of Boaz's position from taking advantage of Ruth, thereby destroying her reputation and endangering his own. Biblical writers were not squeamish about describing sexual encounters, but the writer of Ruth has deliberately refrained from saying there was a liaison between Ruth and Boaz. Both Ruth and Boaz acted virtuously in a situation they knew could have turned out otherwise." (F.B. Huey, Jr., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*)

The first thing Boaz did was pronounce a blessing on Ruth and then he complimented her for her kindness in choosing him instead of one of the younger bachelors. Then he commended her for her character and good reputation. For all you single Ruth's and Boaz's out there, look for someone with good character first when you are choosing a mate. Physical attraction might be an initial factor, but beauty fades. Character and reputation last long after physical beauty has faded.

And let me give a private word to all the Ruths out there, all you single gals. Guys, cover your ears for a second. Girls, if you're dating a guy and he says, "I love you so much, let's do it." Here's what you do. Take your hand and make a fist. Then punch him three times right between the eyes, saying, "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Knock some sense into him because he's acting stupid. That's not love, that's lust. The Bible says, "Love is patient and kind."

### **Our lesson: God always rewards our acts of faith**

God rewarded Ruth's faith with Boaz's love and acceptance. The key verse about faith in the Bible is Hebrews 11:6. It says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

Do you remember Naomi's complaint in Chapter 1? She said, "I left full and returned empty." When she left Bethlehem with her family she had a husband, sons, and enough resources to travel and live abroad. She returned empty. Ruth's testimony is just the opposite. She came to Boaz empty and returned full. She had a cloak full of grain and a heart full of hope.

Faith is coming to the edge of everything you can see and feel and then taking one more step. It is believing that God will either be there to catch you, or if not, He'll teach you how to fly!

Is there an area of your life where you need to obey God by faith? My friend, Jim Henry, told me about a young married couple who came to know Christ in his church. They were excited about their faith. They had no church background, and one Sunday they heard Jim mention that every Christian ought to tithe. The young couple approached Jim after the service and said, "Pastor, we've decided to tithe. Now, what is it?" Jim had to explain to them that it meant given a tenth of their income to the Lord's work. They said, "Great!" They didn't even know that it meant, and they were willing to trust God and obey Him. That's the kind of faith God rewards!

#### **4. JESUS' GRACE: He accepts us into His Family even though we are strangers**

The story of Ruth is a love story about how a foreign widow from the pagan land of Moab receives the kindness and grace of Boaz. She had no identity or future. In Boaz she finds a new family and a new future. It's also a powerful allegory of how we all start out as foreigners and strangers in relation with God. We're all born into the wrong family. But like Boaz, Jesus lovingly accepts us into His forever family.

The Bible says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (Ephesians 2:13, 19)

When Boaz awakened he said, "Who is it?" Ruth said, "It is Ruth, your servant." Before this time, Ruth is often referred to as "Ruth, the Moabitess." Nobody wanted her to forget she was unclean and unacceptable as a pagan Moabite. But here, Ruth makes no reference to her past. Instead she speaks of her future. She said, "I am at your service." When you come to Jesus you can forget your past too. And you make yourself available to Jesus. "I'm at your service, Lord."

#### **Our lesson: All our hopes are fulfilled at the feet of Jesus**

At the feet of Boaz, Ruth's life was changed. There she found a new family and a new future. And that's what we find at the feet of Jesus. According to the law of Levirate marriage, Ruth had to right to confront Boaz publicly and demand that he marry her according to the law. But instead, she approached him privately.

A lot of our faith is practiced in public; we worship together and serve together. But the true essence of following Jesus boils down to having a personal relationship with Jesus. Who you are spiritually isn't determined by what you do publicly on Sundays, it's who you are day-in and day-out in your personal walk with Jesus. I have a great time here on Sundays worshipping Jesus with you and sharing His Word. But I've got to confess that the sweetest times I have with the Lord are when He and I are together one-on-one; mano y Savior.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Boaz and Ruth: It was a match made in heaven. Throughout history there have been many famous couples. Adam and Eve, Ruth and Boaz, Romeo and Juliet, Ken and Barbie, Brad and Angelina. But the most loving couple in history is Christ and His Church. The Bible teaches that God loves us the way a perfect husband loves a bride, even though she is less than perfect. For

instance, this love is expressed in Isaiah 62. Like an unfaithful wife, Israel had strayed from God. But rather than rejecting Israel, God promised a rebellious nation, "No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah [my delight], and your land Beulah [my bride]; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married." (Isaiah 62:4) Even though Israel had sinned and been rebellious, God offered to take her as His bride.

You've probably heard the song "Beulah Land" and thought Beulah meant "heaven." It's a nice song, but this is the only time the name "Beulah" appears in the Bible and it is God's way of telling you He wants to love you the way a husband loves his bride.

Last May, Jack Edwards and his wife, Gwen, had been out to enjoy the nice weather in Beacon Park in Lichfield, England. They had been married for 61 years and spent all their time together. While they were waiting at the bus stop to return home, a car driven by a drunk driver crashed through a barrier and was barreling right at them. In that split second, 83-year-old Jack pushed his wife safely out of the way of the speeding car. She escaped with only minor injuries, but Jack took the brunt of the force and was killed instantly. Witnesses reported that Jack could have saved himself, but in choosing to save his wife, he sacrificed his life.

We are all touched by stories like that. That's exactly what Jesus has done for us. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Jesus went to the cross to die for His bride, the Church. He loves you that much. Will you trust Him as your Redeemer? Will you accept Him as your Heavenly Husband? It's a match made in heaven!

## OUTLINE

### Lessons from "The Night at the Threshing Floor"

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Our lesson: We should make creative plans to follow God's will

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3. BOAZ'S LOVE: He rewarded her faith with his offer of protection and provision

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...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." *Ephesians 2:19*

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David O. Dykes  
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes