

In the Line of the King: Ruth
Matthew 1:5; Ruth 1-4
ABC 12/17/12

At the beginning of most fairytales are the words, *Once upon a time*. These words suggest memories of damsels in distress & courageous princes coming to their rescue. *Once upon a time* really did happen. & 2 damsel in distress were rescued by a prince of a man. What the Mona Lisa is to painting & what David or Venus are to sculpting, Ruth is to literature. This is the only OT book named after a non-Jew. It also has no evil character in it but instead is a showcase of grace, both mankind's & God's. The Bible has 66 books but it has one story & that is Jesus. Today we see Him as our Redeemer just as Boaz was Ruth's redeemer. This book is a beautiful picture of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Kinsman Redeemer, but I get ahead of myself. Ruth functions as a bridge between the Judges & King David. When do the events of this story take place? **1:1a** This was a time of turmoil & disorder. Even though most of Israel turned away from God, this book shows that God preserved a remnant during that dark time. Set in the dark & bloody period of the judges, this cameo of a family that sacrifices for each other & provides for the needy, gives a contrast to the chaos going on around them. In some ways, Ruth acts as hinge point in God's redemptive plan. God is preparing His people to transition away from the chaos of their self-centered rule to the rule of a good king, David, who is a foreshadowing of the true King, Jesus. We also see the hidden & continuous providence of God revealed in this book. Of its 85 vss, more than ¼ of them mention God; of these, only twice is it the narrator (1:6 & 4:13); the rest are from the mouths of those speaking in the book. The characters themselves are conscious that God sovereignly orders events & they depend on Him to do so. Perhaps the question at the heart of this book, for those in the story & for us, is this: Does God still care? Does He still care for Naomi in light of the loss of her husband & sons? Does He still care for Israel in the midst of more than 300 years of rebellion? The clear answer is that God is our Kinsman-Redeemer who perfectly cares for us in the midst of our trials. We find God sovereignly orchestrating all things, even trials, for the good of His people, who He will one day redeem through the perfect rule of the Kinsman King. PRAY

1. Chapter 1 In the 1st chpt, we're introduced to Naomi, an Israelite woman whose husband & sons left the land God had given them & moved to Moab because of famine. Ebimelech dies & his sons marry girls from Moab. Ruth was a Moabite. Her ancestry had its beginnings in the incest committed between Lot & his oldest daughter. Even though Moabites were related to the Israelites, they were enemies because Moab had opposed Israel's advance into the Promised Land. Moabites were polytheistic pagans, even offering human sacrifices to their gods. As a result, God prohibited the Jews from intermarrying with them (Ezra 9:10-12), unless they renounced all that being a Moabite meant & became all that it meant to be a Jew.

Naomi's sons also die, leaving Naomi & her daughters-in-law, Orpah & Ruth, alone & unable to provide for themselves. Naomi heads back to Bethlehem & pleads with her daughters-in-law to leave her so they would avoid what she sees as a hopeless fate. Orpah leaves, Ruth stays. **1:16-17**

Ruth's decision was one of complete surrender, not only to Naomi, but also to the God of Israel. It equaled a declaration of love (though the word love never appears in this book, despite the fact that love pervades every chapter). Did Ruth have any idea her commitment would continue a series of events that started in eternity past & would affect all mankind? Did she know that hundreds of years earlier, when God promised Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed through his seed, that she'd have anything to do with that blessing? She was a foreigner to the covenant nation of Israel, a widow, a Moabite, a Gentile. Did Ruth know that by submitting to Yahweh, she would be brought into the sphere of a kind, wealthy man named Boaz, a relative of Naomi's, who would become their kinsman-redeemer & restore their heritage? Did she know her future great-grandson, David, was destined to become the great king of Israel & father of the royal line of Jesus the Messiah & Savior of the world? Ruth knew none of these things. Yet they all occurred because of her surrender to the true & living God. Naomi & Ruth arrive in Bethlehem.

1:19b-21

All Naomi's labors seem to have been for nothing. She says, *Don't call me Naomi*, which means pleasant. *Call me Mara*, which means bitter. Why? *Because God has afflicted me*. She left

Bethlehem full, hopeful, & expectant, but came back bitter, weary, & empty. Ever felt that way? I think we all have, thus we can all learn from this. God had already begun to work out blessings of His own. While the narrator lets our ears hear Naomi complain in vs 21, what does he direct our eyes to see in vs 22? Ruth & the beginning of the barley harvest.

Before we continue, how do you respond to life's devastating twists & turns? Most of us have a reflex to ask, *Why?* Even unbelievers do this. People who never go to church, who claim no religious faith, when something devastating happens, still ask, *Why?* It's as if they assume that somewhere behind it all there must be a purpose. We shouldn't be surprised by this. It's part of the image of God in us. In every line of his hymn from 1774, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, William Cowper reminds us not to judge God's ways by only what we can see with our eyes:

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy & shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.*

The story of Ruth is more than just an account of human kindnesses. It's an argument for God's grace. Yes, it has great human examples of kindness, but it displays beautifully the grace & sovereignty of God. We may never know *why* but we can know & trust the One who does know!

2. Chapter 2 Naomi & Ruth came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the harvest season (1:22).

They were poor. They had no one to support or take care of them. God's law required that the poor be allowed to follow the reapers through the fields & pick up what was left behind (Lev 19:9-10). As *luck* would have it, Ruth *happens* to end up gleaning a field owned by a rich relative of her deceased father-in-law. Boaz was kin. By *coincidence*, Boaz spotted Ruth & had compassion on her. I'm sure there were other poor widows gleaning in the fields. But Boaz took notice of & had compassion on Ruth before she even knew who he was. Hasn't Jesus done the

same for us? Loving us & drawing us to Himself before we knew Him. Boaz is a beautiful shadow of Jesus. **2:8-9, 14-16**

God is providing for Naomi & Ruth through Boaz. Now we come to the most important interchange in the chapter, vss 10–13. Ruth raises a question which turns out to be very profound. It's one that we all need to ask God. Hardly anything in our life is more important than the answer we get.

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, & said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" (10).

Ruth knows she's a Moabitess. From a natural viewpoint she has 2 strikes against her. She doesn't resent this, but accepts it. As a non-Israelite she doesn't expect any special treatment. Her response to Boaz's kindness is astonishment. She's very different from most people today. We expect kindness & are astonished & resentful if we don't get our rights. But Ruth expresses her sense of unworthiness by falling on her face & bowing to the ground. Proud people don't say thanks. Humble people are made even more humble by being treated graciously. Grace isn't intended to lift us out of lowliness. It's intended to make us joyful & content in God.

How does Boaz respond? **4:11-12**

There's no better place to be, is there? Have you noticed that there are no supernatural events or miracles in the book of Ruth? But it's easy to see that God's hand guided things as directly as He did the Exodus from Egypt. Although the main characters express confidence in God, His presence is actually in the background working quietly. The lesson we see is that God's hand can be found in the everyday affairs of life. Ruth just happened onto Boaz's field. It just happened that Ruth found the one guy she had to marry in order for the Messiah to be born into the world, right? The whole idea is God loves to work in the mundane, where you can't see it. God loves to work in tough times, where you have to look to Him but can't see Him working. There are no miracles, no heavenly revelations, no prophetic disclosures, & yet there's the strong sense of God's purpose & God's providence being unfolded. Chpt 2 ends with **23**.

3. Chapter 3 In chapter 3, Naomi tells Ruth to go to the threshing floor where Boaz, the near kinsman, would be. She told her to humble herself, lie down at his feet, & that **he will tell you**

what you should do (3:4). Ruth does this. She places herself at the feet of her redeemer. That's where each of us should be. There's no better place to be, no place where we're more welcome to be, than at the feet of our Lord. When we're at His feet we acknowledge His majesty, power, & goodness as well as our own need. Although this custom Naomi tells Ruth about seems strange to us, dating would have seemed even stranger to Ruth! According to God's law, if a man sold his inheritance & had a relative who was willing & able to do so, the kinsman could buy back the inheritance. Boaz had given Naomi & Ruth a reason to hope that he might be willing to do so. Ruth risked losing the only thing she had left, her name, that she might obtain Boaz's favor. Ruth plainly told Boaz what she wanted. **3:9**

In essence, she said, *I want to be your wife*. Boaz said, *Sounds good to me, but there's a closer relative than me. Let me find out his intentions 1st*. Before we get to that part of the story, it's interesting that the word for **covering** (3:9) is the same word Boaz uses in chpt 2 that translates as **wings**. Boaz says to Ruth, **2:12**.

Boaz himself becomes the answer to that prayer. Like a mother hen who spreads her protective wings over her chicks, he spreads his **coverings**, or *wings* over Ruth, symbolizing his commitment to her.

4. Chapter 4 Key to understanding the redemption that God will bring Ruth & Naomi is the notion of the *kinsman-redeemer*. As explained in Lev 25, the kinsman-redeemer was set up to allow families to buy back or redeem their relatives from slavery or debt-bondage. This law ensured that nobody became landless & locked in a cycle of poverty. It was an inside-the-clan welfare system, where debts & obligations would be paid by a family member so the poor relative could be freed or restored. Boaz offers to be Ruth's redeemer after he's asked to do so. Of course, this is the kind of redeemer the Lord will be for Israel. One day, He'll say through the prophet Isaiah, **you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior & your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob** (Is 60:16). This role of Kinsman-Redeemer also had the responsibility of marrying the childless widow of a family member & having children with her so that the dead man's family line could continue. We saw this with Tamar & Judah. Boaz & Ruth's 1st male child would be considered a

descendent of Elimelech, not of Boaz. Boaz is willing to do this, but there's someone closer in relation who has the 1st chance to do this. Read the 1st part of chpt 4 & you see this guy turns down the opportunity & frees Boaz to do it. **4:9-10**

Why are we told all this? Why is this story in the Bible? Because Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He is our Kinsman by His incarnation (2 Cor 8:9). He is a great & mighty Kinsman, for He is God Himself (Col 2:9). He is a Kinsman of great wealth. All the fullness of grace & glory belong to Him. As Boaz loved Ruth, so Jesus loves us without a cause, freely. **We love Him, because He 1st loved us** (1 Jn 4:19), right? God says, **I have loved you with an everlasting love...I have drawn you with lovingkindness** (Jer 31:3). As Boaz promised to redeem Ruth, so the Son of God promised to redeem us (Heb 7:22). But the law of God which shows us our sin holds us captive. The law has claim upon us, but it doesn't have the ability to redeem us. The law is our kinsman condemner, but can never be our deliverer (Rom 3:19-20). So Jesus willingly paid the price of our redemption, the price demanded by the justice of God. By His life of perfect obedience, He fulfilled the law, & brought in everlasting righteousness for His people. By His atoning death, He fully satisfied the wrath & justice of God as our Substitute. Aren't you glad for that?

4:13-15

In 29 words or 2 sentences (13), we have a wedding, a honeymoon, a home being established, conception, 9 months of expectancy, & the birth of a son. Just saying, a wedding is much more exhausting than it reads here! But in these vs these women are saying,

Naomi, because of Ruth you are surrounded by care, protection, & love. & here's another close relative, a grandson, who will restore your life & sustain you in your old age.

Not only do we have a wedding ceremony consummated, but we also have a widowed grandmother invigorated. Can you imagine this incredible reversal? Remember, Ruth is barren or at least seems to be. In 1:4 we're told she had been married for 10 years & there were no children. The people of Bethlehem know this & pray that God will make Ruth like Rachel & Leah. The author makes it very clear in vs 13 who caused this child to be conceived. **The Lord gave her conception.** While Naomi had schemed for this child, & while Boaz & Ruth had certainly been involved, God uses human means! The book of Ruth shows that even this final provision comes

from the Lord. God, who is good & constant in lovingkindness, not only provides food & a home for Naomi & Ruth, He provides a future family. As Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, similarly, Jesus has taken sinners to be His bride. Thank God, He hasn't left us without a Kinsman-Redeemer. Christ is the Restorer of our lives.

4:16-17a

For Naomi, this must have been the story's climax: little baby Obed lying in her lap. She has an heir. She's placed her hope in God & now can see her hopes fulfilled in little baby Obed. Ruth & Naomi both experience undeserved kindness from God, through Boaz, their redeemer who is also their kinsman. That's nice & a good ending, but do one marriage, one child, & one family matter all that much when society is disintegrating & sinking into sin, as the book of Judges shows? Yes they do! Remember who this child is. They name him Obed. & who is Obed? We find out in the book's final lines: **21b-22**

There the book of Ruth ends. But wait, there's more, not in the book of Ruth but what comes of the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth ends with a genealogy. The 1st book of the NT begins with a genealogy: **Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, & Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse the father of David the king** (Mt 1:5-6). Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Boaz, Ruth, Obed, Jesse, David. How does Matthew introduce his genealogy? With the 1st words of the NT: **The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham**. Where was he born? Bethlehem, the city of Naomi. Naomi didn't come back to Bethlehem empty; she came back with Ruth. She came back with a woman of extraordinary faith. When Naomi came back with Ruth, she came back with the future of the human race, because David &, more importantly, the Son of David, came from Ruth. The woman who called herself empty plays a key role in the epic drama of redemption. By God's grace, this redemption wasn't only a blessing to Ruth & Naomi, it blessed the whole world in a way they never could have imagined! Ruth, Naomi, & Boaz may live in the times of the judges, but God will use this little family to prepare the nation for a king after God's own heart. Amazingly, Ruth, the Moabitess widow, the once impoverished gleaner in the fields of Bethlehem, has become the great grandmother of King David. It's possible that she was even

alive when he was born. However, this isn't the end of the story. David would be an ancestor & a preview of the greater King to come, Jesus Himself. Remember the women in Mt's genealogy of Jesus? Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, & Bathsheba. Tamar & Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, & Bathsheba was married to a Hittite. But God used each of them to further the line that led to the Messiah. This is a family tree that beautifully illustrates the amazing love & grace of God & His redemptive work on our behalf. God's plans in the OT center on the Israelites, to be sure, but only in order to prepare the way for the salvation of all nations: for Moabites like Ruth & Canaanites like Rahab & Tamar, for Jew & Gentile, for you & for me.

Look at Ruth chapter 5 & notice vss 1-5.

& so it came to pass that Boaz & Ruth were married in the presence of many witnesses. The wedding guests came from all around Judea to add their blessings to the union & future home of Boaz & Ruth. The morning after all the guests had departed, Boaz awakened while it was still early. He searched throughout the house & couldn't find Ruth anywhere. He began to search diligently for her outside & upon entering his fields, he saw his bride gleaning in the fields. Once again, she was dressed in rough clothing & her sack for grain was about her shoulders.

"Ruth!" he called as he ran to her. "Ruth, why are you gleaning in the fields today?"

She bowed low to the ground & said, "My husband, surely I must find something to satisfy the hunger I will have today."

Upon hearing this, Boaz embraced Ruth in his arms & said, "Ruth, do you not understand that since you have become my bride, all that belongs to me, belongs to you?"

Okay, that's all made up! However, this is the rest of the story, isn't it? Boaz is a picture of our Kinsman Redeemer, who has taken us into the family of God & everything that belongs to Him now belongs to His beloved. He has given us an **inheritance which is imperishable & undefiled & will not fade away** (1 Pt 1:4). The rest of this story is found in the NT description of the final Kinsman Redeemer. Let us compare briefly the illustration of Boaz with Jesus our Redeemer. There are many similarities between Boaz & Christ, but let's look at just four.

1. 1st, kinship with the bride was required. In other words, in order to meet the conditions of the law, the kinsman redeemer had to be related to the bride. So Jesus, in order to redeem us, became our relative. He came to take the sandals of humanity & walk among us. John writes, **& the Word became flesh, & dwelt among us** (Jn 1:14). Jesus satisfied this condition of Kinsman

Redeemer. He became a member of the human family so that He could make us members of His family.

2. 2^{ndly}, a kinsman's desire to redeem his bride was voluntary. A kinsman redeemer had to be willing to redeem his bride. Boaz could have walked away. But he didn't. Why? Because he loved Ruth. The Bible says, **In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation** (atoning sacrifice) **for our sins** (1 Jn 4:10). In other words, the Son came to redeem us. & He was willing! Jesus, **for the joy set before Him endured the cross** (Heb 12:2). He **became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross** (Phil 2:8). This is how willing Jesus was. Boaz was related to Ruth & was willing to redeem her. In the same way, Jesus came in the flesh, fully God, yet fully man, God incarnate, & now related by flesh & blood He was willing to redeem us, His bride. Not only must the redeemer be related & willing, but ...

3. The kinsman redeemer had to be capable of paying the redemption price. No matter how much Boaz loved Ruth, he still had to buy the land & settle the estate. Boaz had to have the resources to pay the debts of the widow he wanted & her family's estate. Fortunately, Boaz was wealthy enough to pay off the debts against the property of Elimelech & settle the estate of Naomi & Ruth. As Christians, as the bride of Christ, we **have been bought with a price** (1 Cor 6:20). Christ, who is infinitely wealthy, can handle the cost, but the purchase price wasn't money. The legal tender for our redemption was the blood of Jesus Himself. Paul wrote, **In Him we have redemption through His blood** (Eph 1:7). A kinsman redeemer had to step in & settle any & all debts against his beloved. In the same way, our Lord hung on the cross & triumphantly cried, **It is finished!** The debt of sin has been paid in full! Every single legal claim of the law; every debt of sin attached to His beloved's name was completely paid off; the books have been wiped clean. Jesus Christ is both willing & able to pay the redemption price.

4. Finally, the kinsman redeemer's provision for his bride was comprehensive. Boaz lifted Ruth to his standing. She was no longer the Moabite widow, but was the bride of Boaz. She was made a legal partaker of his name, her status was altered from alien to accepted. Boaz made provision

for all debts, past, present, & future. In the same way, Christ has comprehensively raised our status from:

- sinner to saint;
- enemy to friend;
- outcast to child;
- lost to redeemed;
- beggar to the bride of Christ.

Aren't you glad & thankful for that?

The book of Ruth starts very low & ends very high. We move from death to life, from barrenness to fruitfulness, from emptiness to fullness, from curse to blessing, from bitter to sweet, from living in exile to producing the grandfather of a king! The very fact that the story of Ruth takes place in Bethlehem is itself filled with meaning. It moves from being a place of famine to being a place of fruitfulness. Bethlehem was the burial place of Jacob's wife, Rachel. Now, it's where Obed, his son Jesse, & his son David would be born. & a few centuries later, the Lord would say through the prophet Micah,

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity (5:2).

Hundreds of years later, when Herod asked where the Messiah would be born, this passage from Micah was quoted (Mt 2:4-6). When the fullness of time came, there in Bethlehem, Jesus was born. In His great love, God sent Jesus, who lived a perfect life &, owing no penalty for His own sins (since He was sinless), died on the cross for whoever will repent of their sins & believe. He died for us if we'll turn from our sins & trust in Him. When we do, He grants forgiveness from sin & new life in Christ. Jesus will be our Kinsman-Redeemer.

Most fairytales begin with the words, *Once upon a time*. & nearly all of them end with the words, *& they lived happily ever after*. These words are an appropriate ending for every one of us today who are the bride of Christ. We will all live happily ever after. This is the rest of the story for all of us as Christians. After we take our last breath, our story can close with the words, *& they lived happily ever after*. We'll have been taken away by our Prince; swept away by our Bridegroom; kept eternally in the joy of our Lord forever & ever. The only thing different about our lives & all

the fairytales is that after the words, *& they lived happily ever after*, there are always the final 2 words on the last page: *The End*. This isn't the case for us. There will never be an end to our *happily ever after*. We can't even begin to imagine this! However, we believe by faith in our Kinsman Redeemer, our Lord Jesus, & we cling to His promise of grace, mercy, love, & know that, one day, we will enter the glory of heaven forever. Why? Because:

- He was related to us;
- He was willing to redeem us;
- He was able to redeem us;
- He was able to cover all our debts.

&, the last words on the biography of the church, the bride of Christ & every individual member of the bridal party, those who belong to Him, aren't the words, *The End*; they're the words, *& we lived happily ever after!* That's the point of the book of Ruth: God's lavish, unmerited grace to the unlikely. God loves to redeem sinners. He loves to produce something beautiful out of sordid families. He loves to make foreigners His children & reconcile His enemies. If you haven't yet become part of God's family through the Redeemer, Jesus, please talk to me or someone here about that today. PRAY