**A Love Story**

Prepared by Nathan L Morrison for Sunday February 21st, 2021

Text: Ruth

Intro

1. Many people have said that the Book of Ruth is the most beautiful short story ever written. It’s an account of anxiety, fear, love, and commitment that goes from despair and the darkness of one’s soul to joy and hope. *It begins with despair and ends with delight!*
2. When Benjamin Franklin was the Ambassador to France, he occasionally attended the Infidels Club -- a group that spent most of its time searching for and reading literary masterpieces. On one occasion Franklin read the book of Ruth to the club, but changed the names in it so it would not be recognized as a book of the Bible, which they mocked and held in derision. When he finished, the listeners were unanimous in their praise. They raved that it was one of the most touching stories they’d ever heard and begged him to print it so the public could read it, or that he tell them where he had run across such a remarkable literary masterpiece. He grinned and said, “It is already in print, it is a part of the Bible you ridicule.”
   1. <https://mountaineagle.com/stories/ruth-the-widow-who-found-redemption,20648>
3. The short book of Ruth is for people who wonder where God is when one tragedy after another pounds their faith.
   1. It is for people who wonder whether a life of integrity in tough times is worth it.
   2. It is a story for people who can't imagine that anything great could ever come of their ordinary lives.
   3. The story is not of a leader or deliverer like Moses or Joshua, or a larger-than-life judge like Samson, or about a great king the likes of Saul or David, but of ordinary people trying to eek out an existence among God’s people.
4. Ruth is more than just a love story but also a story of faith, hope & redemption that still resounds with us today!
5. **Scene 1: Suffering and Hidden Hope**
   * 1. Ruth 1 tells us that during the days of the judges there was a famine in the land of Judah.
        1. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem and traveled 30-60 miles, about 7-10 days, to the land of Moab, where they stayed for 10 years.
        2. Elimelech died and the two sons each married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.
        3. Both sons died, leaving their two young widows in the care of their widowed mother.
        4. Such loss and devastation all at once!
        5. Naomi began the journey back from Moab to her home in Bethlehem.
        6. Naomi knew it would be hard on them when they got back to Judah so she implored them to go back to their own country, which Orpah accepts and tearfully leaves.
     2. **1st Love Story**
        + 1. Ruth tells Naomi, “where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).
     3. Despair and Gloom
        + 1. What a gift was Ruth! But Naomi was simply too depressed to let herself feel any comfort.
          2. She had no hope of anything good in her future. Numbed by pain, everything that comes out of Naomi's mouth in Chapter 1 reveals just how sunken was her heart.
          3. As she enters Bethlehem, the women in town see this haggard woman and ask, “Is this Naomi?” (1:19). The name Naomi means “beautiful.”
          4. But such a name mocked her now. She answers back in vss. 20-21: “Do not call me Naomi (“beautiful”); call me Mara (“bitter”), for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”
          5. Scene 1 ends in despair and gloom. Convinced that God is against her, Naomi expressed her hopelessness so much that she couldn't even see the rays of hope peeking through the clouds – the famine was over and she had a loving, loyal daughter-in-law.
     4. For the children of the Lord, it is always true: weeping may endure for the night, but shout of joy comes in the morning! (Psalm 30:5)
6. **Scene 2: Romance and the Grace of God**
7. Ruth 2 through vs. 22 covers one 24-hour day in the lives of Naomi and Ruth, and before the sun sets, the tables will have completely turned for them both.
8. They have to wait until day's end to see it, but we get the hint in vs. 1! Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.
   1. As this chapter unfolds we learn that Boaz had a reputation as a godly man of character and kindness.
   2. He was a man of wealth whose values were governed by God's Word, a fact that is clear in how he treated the poor and how he dealt with his employees.
   3. But the thing that put a grin on the faces of the Jewish listeners of that time was that he was related to the now deceased Elimelech, the importance of which soon becomes apparent.
9. Ruth 2:3: We find a hungry Ruth who goes out to glean with the poor. This was in accordance with the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:9; Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:19).
   1. She had no deliberate plan about which field she would work. She just finds one, rolls up her sleeves and starts gleaning.
   2. But what on the surface to her appears to be a wild coincidence, Ruth just happens to find herself in the field of this man Boaz.
10. **2nd Love Story**
    1. Boaz spots this cute Moabitess gleaning with the poor and it appears it was love at first sight!
    2. He goes out of his way to show her favor: he told Ruth to stay in his fields and with his maids and to drink from the servants’ water (2:8-9), looked into her background (2:11-12: she sought refuge under God’s wings *[H3671]),* fed her a huge lunch (2:14), and he gave secret instructions to his workers to deliberately drop some sheaves for her (2:15-16), and by evening Ruth had gleaned an “ephah” of barley!
       1. An ephah was about 30 pounds!
       2. This was a huge amount of barley for one woman to gather in a single day. It testifies both to Ruth’s focus and to Boaz’s generosity!
11. Ruth 2:19-22: When Ruth goes home to Naomi and recounts the details, the lights suddenly click on for Naomi.
    1. When she heard that the name of their benefactor was Boaz, her mourning turned to dancing! “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead!” (2:20)
    2. Naomi also said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives” (2:20: The ESV says, “one of our redeemers” from the Hebrew “kinsman-redeemer”).
12. God’s care for His people
    1. Ruth 2:23: “So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.”
    2. After such mourning and grief, one day changed their outlook, and now Ruth stays in Boaz’s fields with his servants until the end of the Barley Harvest.
       1. Barley was harvested from late March through late April, wheat from late April to late May *(NET Full Notes, O. Borowski, Agriculture in Ancient Israel, 88, 91).*
13. Paul says for those that love the Lord, God works things out for their good (Romans 8:28), and we certainly see God’s care for His people in the book of Ruth!
14. **Scene 3: Renewed Hope and a Risky Proposal**
15. Ruth 3:1-5: A match-making mother
    1. Early in the story Naomi realized what Ruth could not have known -- She understood both the kinsman's obligation to marry the widow of a close relative and the interest that Boaz obviously had in Ruth. So, Naomi takes action on behalf of her daughter-in-law.
    2. Notice her concern for Ruth (3:1): “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?” *(Naomi knew “it only takes a spark to get a fire going.”)*
    3. Naomi offered two types of counsel to Ruth (3:3-4):
       1. First, she told her to fix herself up (3:3): This meant that Ruth had to remove the garments of mourning. This would indicate that she was finished mourning and ready to move on with her life. You can't have a new beginning if you continue to live in the past. Also, the only way Boaz had seen her was covered in the dust and sweat of working in his fields. Naomi is saying, “Dress nicely, put on your best perfume, and go to the threshing floor of Boaz.”
       2. Second, Naomi told her to make herself known to Boaz (3:4): The men would remain with the grain overnight, so watch where he lays down to sleep, but don't let him see you! After he is asleep, sneak up, uncover his feet, and then lie down. This sounds awfully strange! Perhaps, we, like Ruth wondered what happens then? Naomi says, “He will tell you what to do!”
    4. Ruth complied, saying, “All that you say I will do” (Ruth 3:5)
       1. Even here we see the unique and trusting relationship between these two women!
16. **3rd Love Story**
    1. Ruth 3:6-13: A midnight meeting and unusual proposal
    2. Ruth follows through with the rendezvous at destination “grain heap.”
       1. *Now doesn't that sound romantic?* Concerning this meeting there are some things you need to understand.
       2. There was nothing immoral or indecent about this custom. It was simply the woman's way of letting him know that she was interested in marriage. *Men still need a little prompting!*
       3. We live in a time where men do the majority of proposals (women still propose too). But here Ruth will make an unusual proposal!
    3. When Boaz turns over in the middle of the night and awakens, he discovers a woman lying at his feet and wants to know who she is. Ruth identifies herself and then says in 3:9: “So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.” This was Ruth's subtle way of making a marriage proposal. She humbly says, “There is a family link in the Mosaic Law that you are obligated to. But I want you to know that if you would have me as your wife, I will agree.”
       1. “Take your maidservant under your wing” (NKJ: 3:9) was like saying “Take me, I'm yours.”

The word “wings” in Ruth 2:12 is the plural of the same word here translated “wing” (NKJ) or “covering” (NAS) in Ruth 3:9

Boaz had commended Ruth for seeking refuge in Jehovah; how could he refuse her the refuge she sought from him according to God's laws?

He commended her for her loyalty, saying that her latter kindness (her personal devotion to him) was better than her first (her leaving home and family to be with Naomi).

* + 1. “For you are a close relative” indicated something more. “Close relative” in this circumstance under the Mosaic Law meant, “kinsman-redeemer.”

According to Mosaic Law, a kinsman had the responsibility to marry Ruth to preserve the inheritance of Elimelech (Deut. 25:5-10).

* + 1. While she had a legal right to make this request, consider how unusual it is:

[1] A woman proposed to a man, [2] A young person proposed to an older individual, [3] A field laborer proposed to a field owner, and [4] A foreigner proposed to a citizen.

* 1. An unusual promise (3:10-11): After praising her for not chasing after younger guys, he tells Ruth not to worry. He will do all that she requested (v.11). That is, he will redeem her from widowhood!
     1. But he goes on to say that Ruth was worth it for she was “virtuous” (NKJ), “excellent” (NAS) – 3:11
     2. It reminds us of Proverbs 31:10 (NKJ), “Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.”

1. An obstacle to their love and happiness (3:12-13)
   1. Legally, another man could have served as the “kinsman-redeemer.”
   2. This shows Boaz was already thinking of this moment! He truly loved her!
   3. His love is greater than this problem.
   4. Despite the obstacles, Boaz was determined to see Ruth cared for even if it meant losing her himself (3:13).
   5. Notice that he even made this vow before “the Lord.” Now that's real love. What's beautiful about this problem is that he already knew it. He wanted to marry her and had checked into the details of getting it done!
2. Ruth 3:14-18: Boaz now does two additional things to confirm his love and intentions:
   1. First, He protected her reputation
      1. At harvest time prostitutes were known to go to the threshing floor and proposition the laborers.
      2. Boaz did everything he could to avoid even the hint of impropriety by Ruth or himself.
      3. He was honorable.
   2. Second, He paid a dowry to Naomi
      1. The grain was for Naomi. It was like a down payment or earnest that guaranteed his intention.
      2. Ruth may not have understood its significance but Naomi certainly did. After she saw the grain (3:17), she knew his intentions perfectly (3:18)!
      3. “The man will not rest until he has settled it today.”
3. Within a couple of months the dark and despairing circumstances of these two widows who trusted in God was turning to a hope that neither of them could even imagine!
4. **Scene 4: The Sandal Exchange and the Savior**
5. Ruth 4:1-12
   1. The next morning, Boaz skillfully presents the situation to the nearer kinsman, and the man gives Boaz his sandal, a symbolic way of saying that the transfer of right was accomplished.
   2. And so it was that a foreigner from a condemned country was brought into a covenant relationship with God.
      1. A mirror situation with Boaz’s parents: Salmon and Rahab (condemned to die in Jericho!), a Canaanite prostitute who made a covenant with God’s people and who is in the line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) and whose faith is held up as an example for Christians (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25)!
6. **4th Love Story**
   1. Ruth 4:13-22: Boaz and Ruth were married!
   2. Naomi was cared for the rest of her life (Ruth 4:14-17).
      1. Naomi was blessed among the women of Bethlehem! No longer “mara” (bitter).
   3. During one of the darkest times in Israel's history, a most unlikely young lady gives birth to a boy named Obed, who would later father a son named Jesse, who would beget David, the king who would bring Israel back to God and the ancestor to the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ!
   4. Ruth, the Moabitess, like Rahab the Canaanite, is in the physical line of Jesus Christ, foreshadowing the blessings to all the nations of earth as promised to Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus! (Genesis 12:3; Acts 11:18; Galatians 3:26-29).
7. The story of Ruth is a story of everyday people trusting in God and God blessing them!
8. **A Parable of Divine Love**
9. The ultimate theme of this story is redemption!
   1. Ruth, as a young widow, was essentially sentenced to poverty and hardship unless someone redeemed her from this plight *(Like the lost sinner outside of Christ).*
   2. Redemption on a small scale that mirrors God's loving plan of redemption on a large scale!
10. Naomi – The loving parent (God)
    1. She longed for her child's redemption and made a plan of redemption
    2. Redemption was only possible because of a relationship to the redeemer (Boaz to Elimelech, 4:3).
11. Ruth – The lost sinner
    1. She could do nothing to save herself.
    2. She responded to Boaz's grace (2:2, 10, 13).
    3. She repented of her past (3:3 She removed the garments of mourning which represented her past).
    4. She requested that He redeem her (3:9).
    5. She received both the promise of redemption (3:11) and a pledge for the future redemption (3:15).
12. Boaz – The Lord Jesus
    1. He was worthy to redeem her (3:9: a kinsman-redeemer; see Phil. 2:5-11 about Jesus).
    2. He was willing to redeem her (3:11).
    3. He was waiting to redeem her (3:13).
13. God made a plan of redemption and to those who obey His Son they receive redemption and eternal life! (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:7)

**Conclusion**

* + 1. Ruth and Orpah help us see the options:
       1. Orpah had started out to follow Naomi but then bailed.

Many people do that today. They start out but never make a commitment to Christ, or are not grounded in truth (Mark 4:16-19)

* + - 1. Ruth said, “Where you go, I go, your God is my God.”

Those who make this type of commitment are fruitful towards God (Mark 4:20)

1. God doesn't want a half-hearted commitment!
2. He's looking for people today who will trust in Him enough to say, “Your God will be my God.”
3. Are you ready to trust and obey Him today?
4. If not a Christian, you need to be! Just as Ruth saw the truth in Naomi's religion, and wanted it for herself, if you are not a Christian you need to be ready to receive the redeemer into your life!
5. If a Christian in error…repent of your sins and be renewed! Seek the Lord with your whole heart!