

Ruth 2:17-23
December 4, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you reached the age where your parents allowed you to date, what kind of guidance did they give you about choosing whom you date? Or did you even get guidance?!

Q: How many of you have your spouse because someone acted as your matchmaker? If yes, what criteria did they use to match you up? [equally yoked? Shared interests? Attractive?]

Transition: Last week we learned that Ruth was gleaning in her first field that “happened” to belong to Boaz. We processed the ways we could be a channel of the Lord’s favor to others by emulating the acts of kindnesses demonstrated by Boaz. This week Ruth reveals the owner of the field. When Naomi hears the name Boaz, she was pleased because he was an eligible kinsman-redeemer. So she sees a great opportunity to be a matchmaker for Ruth by leveraging a key practice in the Jewish community that helps widows continue to the name of their deceased husband and remain in line for property inheritances. As we go through today’s lesson and the remainder of this book, I want us to explore the concept of the kinsman-redeemer and how each of us currently benefit by it. By the time we finish Ruth, **all of us will be able to appreciate what Christ has done for us by tagging the SIMILARITIES between the kinsman-redeemer practice in the Jewish culture and what Christ has done as our kinsman redeemer.** Let’s pick up the story where we left off last week.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.17:

- So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah.

V.18:

- She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

V.19:

- Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? **Blessed be the man who took notice of you!**” [Christ not only noticed us, but He knew us before we were formed in our mothers’ wombs.] Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.

V.20:

- “The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “**He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.**” [Christ always shows us kindness.] She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”

V.21:

- Then Ruth the Moabitess said, “He even said to me, ‘**Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.**’ ” [Choose to “follow me.”]

V.22:

- Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

V.23:

- So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Process Questions:

Q V.17: Does someone have a good footnote on how much an “ephah” was? [About half a bushel, an unusually generous amount for one day of gleaning. It weighed about 30 pounds and was enough food for many days.]

Observation: Boaz made sure that Ruth and Naomi were well fed. An ephah was considered an unusually generous amount for one day of gleaning, and this would feed them for many days. This flowed out of Boaz’s generosity toward them.

Q V.18: Let’s take a closer look at this verse. Ruth brought more than the barley she gleaned. What else did she bring? [Leftovers from lunch!]

Q: Why is that significant? [When she left the table of Boaz at lunch, she had no idea how much she would be able to glean in the fields that afternoon, and she wanted to make sure there was food for Naomi! Ruth is working hard to take care of her.]

Q V.19-20: Naturally, Naomi was so amazed at the amount of barley and leftovers brought by Ruth that she had to ask, “Where did you work?!” When she learned that the man was Boaz, what do we learn about his connection to Naomi? [He’s our “close relative;” he is “one of our kinsman-redeemers”]

Q: Some of you may be asking, “What is a kinsman-redeemer?!” In case you’re not aware, let me describe it the best way I know how by starting with some background.

First, you will recall that God made a covenant with Abraham that he would multiply his descendants and lead his descendants to Canaan, the Promised Land. Of course, the Israelites inheriting this land had to be blood relatives to Abraham. In the Israelite way of life, the father-son relationship was the most important relationship when it came to inheritances.

Perhaps you’ll recall when God shared His covenant with Abram, Abram raised a legitimate question to God and asked, “O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” The Lord responded, “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” Again, inheritances go from the father to the first born son.

Four generations later (Gen 15:16), Moses dies without getting to enter into the Promised Land, and the Lord appointed Joshua to lead the Israelite people to cross the Jordan to divide the inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Most of the book of Joshua describes the inheritance given to each tribe.

Since inheritances flowed through the men in the family, you can imagine the concern that the women in the family felt spinning this question, “What if my husband dies, and we don’t have a son? How will our family be in line for an inheritance?” The Israelites had a practice that became the Law of Moses, and it was called the Levirate marriage. The word “levirate” in Latin means “Husband’s brother.” So the levirate marriage was the marriage of a widow to the brother of her deceased husband. So the husband’s brother was obligated to marry the widow in order to raise up a male descendant for his deceased brother and thus perpetuate the deceased’s name and inheritance. **The living brother was the dead brother’s *go’el*—his redeemer** (Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5–10; Ruth 3:9–12).

So...let’s all assume we’re married with kids. Ladies, our husbands die prematurely. If we’re married and already have a son, we’re relieved because the family name and the inheritance will be intact and live on. However, if we only had daughters or had no children, we are looking for our “kinsman-redeemer.” In a polygamous Israel there were many brothers who had only a common father. These too were brothers, though the brotherhood was not the same as that of men who had a common mother. Thus there are two kinds of brothers, full and half, and each represented the blood line of Abraham, whether full-blooded or not.

So we’re trying to find the closest kinsman-redeemer. So here we are in the book of Ruth, and Ruth was married to an Israelite, and her husband died prematurely. Naomi has already told her she can’t help her. So Ruth finds a field to glean during the barley harvest, and it just so happens that she is gleaning in Boaz’s field, a “close relative,” one of our kinsman-redeemers.”

Q: Once Naomi helped Ruth understand that Boaz was a kinsman-redeemer, what did she suggest to Ruth? [Stay in his field and don’t go anywhere else, where she might be harmed.]

Transition: Let’s watch the matchmaking of Naomi.

LOOK:

Christ wants to be our “kinsman-redeemer” for all of His creation. What we learn from today’s study is that God uses people like us

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 423-424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2:17. After working hard all day **Ruth ... threshed the barley**, beat out the grain from the stalks, and had **an ephah**. This was about half a bushel, an unusually generous amount for one day of gleaning. It weighed about 30 pounds and was enough food for many days.

C. An expression of joy (2:18–23)

Ruth's return home to Naomi ended Naomi's emptiness and filled the older woman with anticipation, thankfulness, and hope.

2:18. When Ruth brought home the ephah of barley grain, the results of her toil, Naomi **saw** the large amount. Also **Ruth** gave Naomi the extra portion **she had** saved from her lunch (cf. v. 14). Here was a widow who was not overlooked in the daily supply of food (cf. Acts 6:1). Naomi would be cared for by Ruth.

2:19. Naomi requested the name of Ruth's benefactor and prayed a blessing on him before Ruth answered her question. **Ruth** disclosed that she had **worked** in the field of **Boaz**.

2:20. **Naomi** repeated her blessing, now knowing to whom it should be applied (cf. v. 19a). Her night of sorrow with its fog of depression had broken into the dawning of a new day of joy. As God was the source of her sorrow (1:20–21), He was now the source of her joy. God's **kindness** (*hesed*; cf. 3:10 and comments on 1:8) again rested on **the living**, Ruth and herself.

Naomi's mind immediately perceived the significance of the situation. Even **the dead** might soon be blessed, in that the name of Elimelech, her dead husband, could live on through her faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth. Boaz was a **close relative**, but more than that, he was a **kinsman-redeemer**. He could act as a redeemer of property and persons. He could act as a *levir*, a Latin term for brother-in-law. Boaz could redeem by fulfilling the levirate law, which required a brother of a deceased man to marry his widow and raise up a son to his name (Deut. 25:5–10). Though Boaz was not a brother to Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband (Ruth 4:10), he was a close relative to the family and could act as a *levir* if he so desired. Naomi sensed the willingness of Boaz. No explanation is given as to why Naomi did not mention the nearer kinsman-redeemer (cf. 3:12).

2:21–22. **Ruth** had more good news. Boaz had invited her to remain in his field throughout the harvest (cf. vv. 8, 23). Naturally Naomi encouraged Ruth to accept Boaz's generosity. Perhaps to emphasize her need to stay there, **Naomi** reminded **Ruth** of the danger that might lurk in another **field**. This was a reminder of the especially low morals in the days of the Judges and Ruth.

2:23. Ruth's loyalty was revealed in her obedience to Naomi's words. She gleaned with Boaz's **servant girls** (cf. v. 8) for the several weeks of **the barley and wheat harvests**, and **lived with** Naomi during that time. However, the tension in the plot continued, for the harvest would soon come to an end. What would happen to the widows after the harvest was over?

Prime, J. (2007). Opening up Ruth (pp. 60-63). Leominster: Day One Publications.

The Lord's lavish favour is hope-giving for the future (vv. 17–23)

The closing verses of the chapter show Naomi's recognition of the Lord's kindness as she heard Ruth's account of the day. She saw Ruth returning laden with barley: someone had been generous. 'Who?' 'Boaz.' 'The Lord bless him! Despite all the bitter things I have experienced, the Lord has not stopped showing kindness to me. And oh, I've just thought of something: Boaz is one of our kinsman-redeemers. A relative with a special, God-given, responsibility to help us.' As Ruth then told Naomi what Boaz said to her, we can imagine the cogs starting to whirr in Naomi's mind, perhaps not wanting to rush ahead, but wondering where this might lead. So she told Ruth to stay with Boaz's girls.

What a difference a day can make! Evidence of the Lord's lavish favour on that one day gave Naomi renewed hope for the future that only hours earlier had looked bleak and dark. What a difference a taste of the Lord's lavish favour makes! It did not change what was true about Naomi's circumstances. She remained a widow. She had still lost two sons. She continued to be poor and life was hard. But she had a hope-giving experience of the Lord's kindness, which gave her reason to believe that, while the Lord's anger lasts for a moment, his favour lasts for a lifetime. It cannot be wrong for us to imagine Naomi going to bed at the end of that day with a smile on her face.

Ruth 2 calls for three responses from us as Christians:

1. Take time to trace the Lord's meticulous plan to show us his lavish favour.

Fast-forwarding the story, the lavish favour shown to Naomi and Ruth resulted in Ruth marrying Boaz, and them having a child called Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David, the royal ancestor of the Lord Jesus. It is never out of place to reflect on how through all the events of the Old Testament the Lord was meticulously following his plan to lavish favour upon rebellious human beings. The Old Testament is the record of the Lord bringing every detail into play at the right time and in the right place, until, at just the right time, Christ died, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. The Christian should reflect not only, as it were, on that macro-plan, but also upon the Lord's micro-plan in relation to each individual who takes refuge in him and experiences his lavish favour. For every Christian there is a story of the Lord's meticulous plan, slotting people and events and meetings and so much more together—often in a way that is only seen in retrospect—as he brings his people to experience his lavish favour. This is not just the case when we first experience his favour. The Lord delights in continuing to shower his lavish favour on his people—often in ways that are far beyond all they can ask or even imagine, as they take refuge in him day by day.

2. Hear the call to follow in the favour-showing pattern of Boaz and the Lord Jesus.

In his godly generosity, Boaz prefigured the godly generosity of the Lord Jesus. As a follower of the Lord Jesus, every Christian is called to do the same. The Lord Jesus came to show his lavish favour so that his followers would then be channels of his favour to others. One of the distinctives of the people of Israel was that, in obeying God's law, they would provide for the poor, the disadvantaged, the widow, and the alien. God's promise was that those who obeyed him would never lose out (see Deut. 15:7–11). The showing of generous kindness towards others is something the Lord often chooses to use to bring others under the refuge of his wings.

3. Take courage for the future by considering the Lord's lavish favour in the past.

Nothing gives greater hope for the future than past experiences of the Lord's favour. The Lord's favour does not mean a trouble-free life. At the end of Ruth 2, Naomi and Ruth are still widows, poor and without much, but they were able to smile about the future because they had received evidence of the Lord's favour to them in their distress. How often the psalms tell a story of the Lord's favour to his people, despite their unfaithfulness to him, proclaiming the message, 'See what the Lord has done: it makes sense to take refuge in him!' As we take refuge under the Lord's wings we are called to live in the confidence that, God being for us, no one can be against us. We can live, confident that the same God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will graciously give us *all* things we need as we face the *all* things of life (see Rom. 8:28–32).

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