

Place: Lurgan Baptist 4:10:2005

Reading: Ruth 3:8-18

THE ROMANCE OF REDEMPTION

8. RUTH THE RECIPIENT

The harvest season was an especially joyful time for the Jews (Is 9:3, 16:10) which is exactly the way that God wanted it. Moses said, “ *The Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.* ”

(Deut 16:15) Most people live to day separated from the sources of their daily bread and don't realise all that's involved in producing food. Perhaps our table prayers would be more joyful and more grateful if we realised all that a farmer goes through to keep us alive. Harvesting and threshing were cooperative enterprises in Israel. The men of a village would take turns using the threshing floor, which was usually a raised platform outside the village and often on a hill where it would catch the evening breeze. The men would deposit the sheaves on the floor and then separate the grain from the stalks by having oxen walk on it (Deut 25:4) or by beating the stalks.(2:17)

Once the grain was separated, the workers would throw the grain into the air, and the breeze would carry the chaff away, while the grain fell to the floor. The grain would then be heaped up to be carried away for marketing or storage. The men often worked in the evening when the breeze was up, and they slept at the threshing floor to protect the harvest. Now four times in this chapter there is mention of feet. (3:4, 7-8, 14) Ruth had fallen at the feet of Boaz in response to his gracious words (2:10) But now she was coming to his feet to propose marriage. She was asking him to obey the law of the kinsman redeemer and take her as his wife. Perhaps you're asking the question “ *Well, why didn't Ruth wait for Boaz to propose to her ?* ” His statement in (3:10) suggests a reason. He fully expected that she would marry one of the younger bachelors in Bethlehem. Boaz was an old man and Ruth was a young woman (4:12) and evidently he thought he was out of the running.

But another reason is given in (3:12) there was a nearer kinsman in town who had the first option on Ruth and the property and Boaz was waiting for him to act. Ruth had now forced the issue, and matters would be brought to a head. “ **Life is full of**

rude awakenings,” I think that more than one Biblical character would agree with that. Some of these awakenings are pleasant and some are unpleasant. Adam woke up to discover that he had been through surgery and he was now a married man. Jacob woke up to discover that he was married to the wrong wife. (Gen 29:25) Boaz woke up at midnight to find a woman lying at his feet. Now some folk have read all kinds of indecency and immorality into this event. Some feel that Ruth’s action was imprudent, improper and indecent. No-one can deny as Matthew Henry says,

“ *that the tinder and spark were brought very near,* ” yet we need to keep two things in mind as we approach this passage.

1. The CUSTOMS of the Country:

Don’t forget that the setting is Eastern, and they have got different customs and laws from our own. What Ruth did then was the custom of that day. Mr. Knapp says, “ *It is an Oriental courtship, and strange and unbecoming as Ruth’s conduct might appear in the eyes of Westerners, it was considered proper in the days when the judges ruled, and would be considered so still in the east.* ” Therefore if there is any girl who wants to plead Ruth’s example for similar conduct make sure that you apply Jewish customs. 1.

2. The CITIZENS of the City:

Looked upon Ruth as “ *a virtuous woman,* ” (3:11) that is a woman of moral strength. My it was not sinful lust that brought Ruth to Boaz rather it was Scriptural principle. For as we shall see the claim that Ruth made to Boaz was in perfect harmony with Scripture. Now keeping those factors in mind lets see Ruth as she goes to the threshing floor and lies at the feet of Boaz. There are two lovely phrases in the passage upon which I want to hinge our study this ! The first phrase is,

(1) “ FEAR NOT,” “ MY DAUGHTER,”

Look if will at (2:11) What a comfort those words must have been to Ruth. Here she was. She had ventured boldly that night to where Boaz slept. But the words, “ *fear not,* ” assured her that her action was acceptable and that her request would be performed. “ *Fear not,* ” is the word of assurance that the Lord gave to many of His servants. Do you recall what God said to Abraham, “ *Fear not Abram, I am Thy shield and Thy exceeding great reward.* ” (Gen 15:1) Was this not the word that God gave to old Jacob ? “ *I am God, the God of thy*

father, fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation.” (Gen 46:3) What about Moses ? (Num 21:34) Joshua (8:1) King Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:17) Ezekiel, (3:9) Daniel, (10:12) Joseph, (Matt 1:20) Zecharias (Lk 1:13) Mary, (1:30) the Shepherds (2:10) Paul, (Acts 27:24) John on the isle of Patmos (Rev 1:17) My God knows what a fearful people we are, and so He fills this book with His “*fear nots.*” Are you fearful this ?

Is it the foe around you ? The feebleness within you ? The future before you, that is causing you to fear ? My God hath not “*given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” (2 Tim 1:7) “*My daughter don't be afraid,*” Now why was Ruth not to fear ? Well, have a look at the reasons. She was not to fear because,

(a) THE REQUEST SHE MADE WAS LAWFUL:

Look if you will at (3:9) She doesn't say, “*I am Ruth the Moabitess,*” she puts that aside for she has now become a part of the plan and the people of God. She said, “*I am Ruth, your maidservant.*” She's looking at this as a whole new beginning. She's following the counsel of her mother-in-law and saying the right thing at the right time. Now there seems to be an unwritten question by Boaz that is not in the text, but we know it is there because the answer is there. His second question after he said, “*Who are you ?*” must have been, “*what do you want ?*” Ruth offers an amazing response that we would not understand without taking into account the culture of the Old Testament. Did you notice,

1. The PECULIARITY of the Request:

“*Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid,*”

(3:9) Now that's peculiar language for we have nothing like this in our marriage customs. The word “*skirt,*” in (3:9) is translated “*wings,*” in (2:12) Ruth had come under the wings of Jehovah and now she would be under the wings of Boaz her beloved husband. If you turn with me to (Ezekiel Ch 16) you'll discover the beautiful significance of Ruth's words. Here the Lord is speaking of His relations with Israel under the figure of betrothal and marriage. So that when Ruth says, “*Spread therefore thy skirt or wing over thine handmaid,*” she is asking for that care and protection that a husband gives to his wife. Have you ever seen a mother bird spreading its wings over its young ones to protect them ? Well, that's the picture right here ! Now the bride proposing to the bridegroom may seem a little unconventional to us yet it

was proper in those days. There was no impropriety in Ruth's action. Indeed, did you notice,

2. The PURPOSE of the Request:

You see, Ruth's purpose was to notify Boaz, that he as a kinsman had a responsibility to marry her. Now 13 times in the Book of Ruth we find references to the kinsman. The Hebrew word "goel," means kinsman redeemer. What was a kinsman? What were the duties imposed upon a kinsman? A kinsman had three main duties.

* He had a Responsibility in relation to Property: this is outlined for us in (Lev 25:25)

* He had a Responsibility in relation to Slavery: this is outlined for us in (Lev 25:47)

* He had a Responsibility in relation to Family: this is outlined for us in (Deut 25:5-6)

Now remember the union between Mahlon and Ruth was fruitless. Mahlon died childless. There was therefore an obligation resting on his next of kin to marry Ruth, and the firstborn would be regarded as the child of the deceased so that his name would not be put out of Israel. Now what are we saying? We are saying that Boaz could redeem Ruth and the property (4:3) thereby obeying the law in (Lev Ch 25) and he could marry Ruth and raise children according to the law in (Deut Ch 25) " Spread therefore thy wing over thine handmaid for thou art a near kinsman." (3:9) My is this not what the Saviour became for us? In order to redeem us from poverty (1 Cor 4:7) and from slavery (Jn 8:34) Christ " took part of flesh and blood," (Heb 2:14) and just as Boaz rejoiced in Ruth coming to claim him fully, so Christ rejoices when we come to claim His fullness. (Eph 3:19 4:13 5:18) My are you claiming all that God has for you in Christ? A life of fruitfulness, freshness, and fullness?

*" For this I pray Lord, for this I plead,
Thy Spirit's fullness flood my soul
Be Thou enthroned Lord, within my heart
And all my yielded life control,"*

(b) THE REPUTATION SHE HAD WAS BEAUTIFUL:

Ruth was renown for three things !

1. Her KINDNESS:

Look if you will at (3:10) Do you see that word

“ *kindness* ? ” (hesed) it’s the same word used in (1:8) and it denotes love, loyalty, reliability, faithfulness, loving-kindness ! It’s a word that is found often in the New Testament. For example the apostle Paul says, “ *put on therefore as the elect of God kindness.* ”

(Col 3:12) Writing to the Ephesians he says, “ *And be ye kind one to another tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.* ” (4:32 Lk 6:35) When a kind person hears a piece of malicious gossip he does not run to the phone to let others in on the delightful titbit. When others faults are pointed out, he tries to offset their failures by pointing out their good qualities ! Kindness ! Do you possess it ? Can Christ commend you for it ? 1.

2. Her SINGLE-MINDEDNESS:

“ *Inasmuch poor or rich,* ” (3:10) Some scholars believe that Boaz was old enough to be Ruth’s father. But because Boaz could be the kinsman-redeemer, Ruth sought him instead of the young men. Her choice was made on character and spirituality, and that is always commendable ! You see, her affections were not divided. My what about your affections ? Does the Saviour occupy first place in your devotion ? Or could the charge that was levelled against the church at Ephesus be levelled against you ? “ *Thou hast left thy first love.* ” (Rev 2:4) 1, 2,

3. Her HOLINESS:

Look if you will at (3:11) This word comes from the same Hebrew word that is translated “ *wealth,* ” (2:1) and “ *valour,* ” (Judges 6:12) The word basically means

Strength, power, and force. Depending on the context where it is used, it can refer to physical strength, material strength, or character strength. Obviously in our passage it refers to character strength. Ruth was a woman of moral strength and purity. She was a very good woman and this encouraged Boaz to promise to marry her. Scripture poses the question, “ *Who can find a virtuous woman ? For her price is far above rubies. Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised.* ” (Pro 31:10)

Holiness ! Is this not the life that we are to pursue ?

“ *Follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.* ” (Heb 12:14) Do you recall Murray McCheyne’s frequent prayer, “ *Lord*

make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be.”

Ruth had a good reputation ! Have we ? My people observe our lifestyle. They can tell how we live. If we are genuine they will know it. “ *For all the city doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.* ” My what do the people know about you ? Are you known for your kindness or harshness ? Single-mindedness or worldliness ? Holiness or uncleanness ? (a) (b)

(c) *THE RESPONSE SHE HEARD WAS WONDERFUL:*

For did you notice that Boaz responded to Ruth in a three fold way !

1. He ACCEPTED Her:

Its interesting to notice that when Ruth said, “ *Spread therefore, thy skirt over me,* ” (3:9) she was actually saying to Boaz, “ *Spread therefore thy wings over me.* ” It’s the same word that was translated “ *wings,* ” in (2:12) In other words, if Boaz put the corner of his cloak over Ruth, it would be his way of saying, “ *I accept you.* ” He not only accepted Ruth but he blessed her. “ *Blessed be thou of the Lord my daughter.* ” You see, when you trust Christ as your Saviour, He accepts you and blesses you. You are no longer a stranger living without hope and without God. Some people find it difficult to believe that Christ could really accept them, and they live in bondage to their past ! But Christ does not accept you on the basis of your merit, works, or character, so by faith accept your acceptance.

Its interesting that Ruth did not say, “ *I am Ruth the Moabitess,* ” she simply said, “ *I am Ruth.* ” She had put her past behind her and had forgotten it. My don’t be shackled to what you once were, what you did, or what people said about you. Don’t let the experiences of the past hinder your present life. Christ accepts you, so take it by faith. 1.

2. He ASSURED Her:

Look if you will at (3:11) In the midnight darkness, Ruth could not see the face of Boaz, but she could hear his voice, and that voice spoke loving assurance to her, “ *Fear not.* ” Do you realise that our assurance is not in our feelings or our circumstances, but in His Word ?

“ How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord

Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.”

During the Boxer Rebellion, when the workers with the China Inland Mission were experiencing great suffering, the founder James Hudson Taylor, then in his late seventies said this to his colleagues. “ *I cannot read, I cannot think, I cannot even pray, but I can trust.* ” How do we know that we don’t have to be afraid ? Because we have the promises of God’s Word ! His Word assures us that He will do what He has promised and that He will meet our needs ! (Phil 4:19) 1, 2,

3. He ASSISTED Her:

Look at (3:15) He said, “ *Don’t go back to Naomi empty-handed.* ” (3:17) Was he being humorous ? You see, word had circulated that Naomi had complained about Naomi coming home empty. I think Boaz smiled a little when he said, “ *Go not empty unto thy mother-in law.* ” So he measured six measures of barley, that was equivalent to two ephah’s enough for the two women for ten days. (Exod 16:36) Boaz was giving Ruth a down payment on all of the wealth she would inherit. He was implying, “ *Don’t worry about a thing because I am going to meet all your needs.* ” This was a pledge of more to come ! Do you know something ? When we are at the Lord’s feet, we will not only hear His voice, and experience His blessing, but we will receive His provision (3:15) to carry out to the world the wherewithal to meet its needs. Henry Moorehouse tells the story that once when he was ministering in New York city he heard about a girl who was deep in sin. She lived in the vile dens of New York. Through time she fell sick and was neglected by everyone.

One day a knock came to her door and a young lady came in. She saw the place was in a mess and she asked permission to tidy it up. The work began. The girl was kind, tidying, cooking, doing whatever was needed, but before she left for home she always left a verse of Scripture with the sick person. *One day she came and did her duties as usual, but just before leaving she knelt down beside that sick girl and kissed her.* That kiss opened that sick girl’s heart and she was wonderfully saved. You see, here was a believer, who had gone from her Master’s feet and took the barley, the bread of life with her. The result ? A soul was reached and saved ! (1)

(2) “ SIT STILL,” “ MY DAUGHTER,”

Look at (3:18) Now here is a very human problem that we often find in the Word of God, including the book of Ruth. ***The problem is waiting on God.*** As pressure seems to have taken over our culture, waiting seems to be our most frustrating

experience. We wait in bank lines, supermarket lines, we queue at the airport, we wait in the doctors surgery, on the motorway. And while we wait we become frustrated because we are wasting time. Have you noticed that in the Book of Ruth people have been waiting ? I am certain that Elimelech and his family waited for a while in Bethlehem to see whether the famine would be so severe that they would have to leave. After it appeared, the famine would continue they left and went to Moab. And while they were in Moab, they watched and waited, as their sons married Moabite women.

Then one day, Elimelech told Naomi, he wasn't feeling well, and Naomi watched and waited while her husband died. Its wasn't long after that the two boys become ill, and no doubt their wives must have watched and waited while Mahlon and Chilion died, and then they waited some more. In fact the Scriptures tell us, they waited for ten years, and then Naomi went back to the city she had left years before. And now the story takes another twist because a problem has appeared that will require more waiting. Why ? Because another man is involved in the plot. Look if you at (3:12) You see, Boaz could not intervene until this nearer kinsman decided whether or not he wanted to be the kinsman-redeemer ! Hence, Naomi's counsel, "*Sit still this day.*" Now I want you to see there is something,

(a) VERY BIBLICAL HERE:

A Biblical principle underlying this injunction ! And the principle is this, there is "*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.*" (Eccl 3:7) A time to act, and a time to sit still, a time to work and a time to wait, a time to be active and a time to be passive. Have you found that in the crisis of life you are restless ? Have you discovered that your mind is agitated, anxious, perplexed ? At such times, is the Lord saying to you "*sit still until thou know how the matter will fall.*" Is this God's Word to you this ? My when you don't know what to do, do, nothing. "*Sit still,*" (a)

(b) VERY TYPICAL HERE:

For do you see what Naomi says ? "*for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.*" Boaz is presented as the tireless servant, the man who will not rest till the work of redemption is completed, which is the picture of Christ as He is presented to us in Mark's Gospel. My did you know that the Saviour is working on our behalf personally ? Christ did not rest until the work of redemption was finished on Calvary. Now He is interceding for you in heaven (Heb 7:25) but His love will not rest until, the final phase of your redemption is consummated, the

redemption of your body by His coming again. (a) (b)

(c) VERY PRACTICAL HERE:

I confess that “*waiting*,” is one of the most difficult things for me to do. Whether its waiting for a delayed flight to take off, or waiting in a traffic jam, I like to see things happen on time. Maybe that’s why the Lord arranges for us to wait. There are three phrases that would encourage us in those times.

1. “*SIT STILL*,”

This was wise counsel, for Ruth could accomplish nothing by following Boaz around Bethlehem. “*Their strength is to sit still.*” (Is 30:7) Is that what you need to do ?

2. “*STAND STILL*,”

This was the command of Moses to Israel, when the Egyptian army was pursuing them. There was no need for panic, for God had the situation well in hand. Then the Lord commanded the people to “*go forward*,” (Ex 14:15) and He led them safely through the sea.

3. “*BE STILL*,”

For the psalmist says, “*Be still and know that I am God.*” The Hebrew word means “*take your hands off, relax, let Me be God in your situation.*” Its so easy for us to be impatient with the Lord and start meddling in matters that we ought to leave alone. He is God and His hands can accomplish the impossible ! Will you allow Him to be God in your situation ? (a) (b) (c)

(d) VERY DEVOTIONAL HERE:

1. “*Sit still*,” that’s the Element of Trust:

“*Impractical you say*,” but is it ? Is it not placing implicit confidence in God ? Is it not reckoning on His faithfulness ? Is it not resting on His Word ? Is it not having faith in God ?

2. “*My daughter*,” that’s the Element of Tenderness:

For whatever God is doing for us, with us, and in us. He is doing in love. (Jn 13:1)

3. “ Until,” that’s the Element of Time:

Until He clears the clouds. Until He melts the mists. Until He breaks the barriers. Until He dispels the doubts. Until He solves the problems. Until “ *we see Him face to face.*” Until, “ *we know as we are known.*” Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away. Until He come. Oh, blessed hope perhaps tonight ! “ *Sit still,*” wait His time for the unravelling of your mysteries, the revealing of your path, the solving of your problems, the saving of your family. “ *Sit still,*” for our Kinsman-Redeemer will not rest until the matter is settled. For “ *the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.*” (Ps 138:8)

***“ Be still my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake
All now mysterious shall be bright at last
Be still my soul, the waves and winds shall know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.”***