



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 15
RUTH**

APRIL 9-14, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	Deuteronomy 21-23; Psalm 71	Ruth 1:1-5; Psalm 71
Tuesday	Ruth 1-4; Psalm 72	Ruth 1:6-22; Psalm 72
Wednesday	Deuteronomy 24-27; Psalm 73	Ruth 2-1-23; Psalm 73
Thursday	Deuteronomy 28-31; Psalm 74	Ruth 3:1-18; Psalm 74
Friday	Deuteronomy 32-34; Psalm 75	Ruth 4:1-22; Psalm 75

READ

Ruth 1:1-5

Psalm 71

REFLECT

Principle: Faithlessness results in disaster and destruction.

Ruth is a narrative about the outworking of God's redeeming love. The story of a seemingly insignificant family becomes one of the building blocks in God's preparatory work as He directs history towards the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ. The theology of the kinsmen-redeemer, who is Jesus Christ for us, is found in these precious chapters.

Ruth's story is set amidst the time of the Judges (v 1), giving us a theological picture of the times – not good. Except for those times when God periodically sent a deliverer to rescue His people, the days of the Judges were a bleak dark time of disobedience on the part of the Israelites. Disobedience was inevitably followed by God's judgment resting upon their land, just as the covenant with Moses had threatened (Deut 28:15-68). The final verse of Judges (21:25) tell us, "In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes."

God brings the story of a nation's struggles with faithfulness and repentance to a personal level through the lives of this family. We are told there is a famine in the land (v1). The ultimate irony had occurred. Bethlehem, whose name means "House of Bread," was without food. Elimelech, as head of the family, had a choice to make, a road to choose. He could stay in Bethlehem, mourning the sin that surrounded him and trusting God to provide – or take the other road that led away from God, leaving the Promised Land for the greener fields of Moab. Difficult circumstances will test our faith, too.

Moab's significance lies in its history with Israel. The Moabites originated out of an incestuous relationship (Gen 19:30-38). Their king,

Balak, had hired Balaam to curse Israel when they came out of Egypt (Num 22-24); their women had been a stumbling block to Israel in the wilderness, seducing them to worship their false gods (Num 25); and they recently oppressed the Israelites in the days of Eglon (Judge 3). Does this sound like a place to raise a godly family?

Instead of following the path of faith and repentance, trusting the Lord's provisions, Elimelech followed what seemed to be his best prospects. The road to Moab was a road to disaster and death. The reality of this is not immediately apparent as it rarely is. In Moab, Elimelech dies, and the sons marry Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah). The sons die (no children) leaving behind 3 destitute widows in an alien land. Naomi is described to be 'left without' (v.5). Who would support a foreign widow in her declining years? Naomi was emptied; she had no support system in a family-oriented culture. It was time to make another choice – though this time, it hardly seemed like much of a choice at all.

RESPOND

Have you ever felt empty and afflicted by God? What do you think you would have done in Elimelech's place? How can this tragic family story help us today seek God's will in difficult circumstances? Do you believe God has a plan for you? Psalm 71:7-8 says, "My life is an example to many, because you have been my strength and protection. That is why I can never stop praising you; I declare your glory all day long."

PRAY

Gracious God, how great is Your mercy to me! Forgive me when I stray from You and Your will for me. Help me to seek You in every decision. May I lead my family, friends, co-workers and fellow believers in a closer walk with You.

- C.M.

READ

Ruth 1:6-22

Psalms 72

REFLECT

Principle: God stirs the heart but the choice is ours to repent and obey.

Who has not been touched by or experienced tragedy and death? The story of Ruth and Naomi is our story. Naomi is emptied of a future hope by the world's standards: husband, family, security; emptied for a purpose to seek God. What God will bring from death will be life for Naomi and Ruth.

Naomi hears good news – God has brought food back to Bethlehem. This news brings a change of heart for her and a desire to return to God. Naomi and her daughters-in-law pack up and head for the Promised Land.

Not far out from Moab, Naomi stops the caravan to urge her daughter-in-laws to “go back” home (vv 8-9). Naomi is urging these young women to go back to what they know (family and culture) and a possible future (husband, children and security). Why would Naomi desire to be left alone? Why have her daughters-in-law go back to the place of pain and bitterness? From a worldly point of view this is indeed humane advice to these women of childbearing age – go back home! We have the advantage of seeing God at work in Naomi's heart as she is doing something she could never have done while living in Moab. She is talking about the cost of belonging to the Lord's covenant people – the cost of discipleship and yielding to the grace of God. Nothing will be guaranteed us except that His grace will be sufficient for all our needs, and that He will never be our debtor. Naomi has been changed. The principles of discipleship were muted in her life in Moab; she could hardly speak clearly about it to her sons or their wives. But now she can speak with integrity. Naomi is going back to be with the Lord and his people. She trusts God will provide for her needs.

Orpah's decision to 'go back' is quick and with a kiss (v 14) and we never hear about her again. She chooses the familiar – what is visible and temporal. Who could blame her? Yet as she departs we know that she is returning at a price: her soul.

Our focus now comes to Ruth, as Naomi seems bolstered by Orpah's decision to urge Ruth again to 'go back home'. But Ruth commits her life to Naomi, her all to God, using familiar covenant language. The precious words of Ruth are familiar but never cease to stir us as she vows: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” What a remarkable conversion!

Despite the gift of Ruth in her life, Naomi is embittered (v 20). Barley season has started (v 22), giving us a hint that spiritual revival has started, as evidenced in Ruth's heart

RESPOND

How will you respond today to God's faithfulness and love? How have you seen the hand of God guide you, a family member or friend to bring them back from straying? How have you played a part in the conversion (God is the initiator) of another to faith in Jesus Christ? What steps will you take to count the cost of discipleship and obey?

PRAY

Bless the LORD God, who alone does such wonderful things. Bless his glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with his glory (Ps 17:18). We praise You for awakening our hearts to Your wonder and love. Make me a worthy disciple. Give us boldness to share the gospel with others

- C.M.

READ

Ruth 2:1-23

Psalm 73

REFLECT

Principle: God is always at work even when we can't see or explain it.

Before God changes our circumstances, He wants to change our hearts. God's purpose in providence is not to make us comfortable but to make us conformable, "conformed to the image of His son" (Rom 8:29). Christ-like character is the divine goal for each of His children.

Naomi arrives in Bethlehem bitter against God, telling the women of her community to call her "Mara" (1:20). But Ruth was willing for God to have His way in her life, so God began His gracious work with Ruth. Living out her faith, Ruth begins to glean in the harvest fields trusting God's Law (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22). Whenever they reaped a harvest, God's people were required to consider the poor and leave gleanings for them. While gleaning, Ruth is noticed by Boaz (v 5).

We are introduced to Boaz as a man of wealth, influence and a relative of Elimelech (v 1). Boaz showed extraordinary generosity and kindness to Ruth, a foreigner from a land despised by the Israelites. In response to Boaz's kindness and grace, Ruth falls at his feet in humble gratitude (v 10). She forgot her fears and rested on his kind promise of provision and protection (vv 8-9, 15-18). The Hebrew word for this kindness is *hesed*; God's loving-kindness, covenant loyalty, and His through-and-through goodness. This story reminds us God has always kept a remnant of faithful people in the midst of evil times (Gen 45:7; 1 Kings 19:18; Micah 2:12; Rom 11:5).

When Ruth arrives home, the sight of food and news of Boaz causes a change in Naomi. Naomi experiences the hope (Ps 33:20) each of us

needs to triumph over difficulties (Ruth 1:12). She speaks words of blessing for the first time (v 19-20). What a move from bitterness to blessedness! The hope she has is in Boaz as the kinsman-redeemer (v 20). Naomi encourages Ruth to remain close to Boaz through the harvest and Ruth obeys (v 22-23).

In ancient Israel the kinsman-redeemer was the male relative in the family responsible for protecting the rights of the family. His role was to avenge family wrongs, or more often, to buy back, or redeem, land that had originally belonged to the family. According to the Law of Moses, the land ultimately belonged to God, not to individuals. Families owned leasehold on the land, originally given to them by lot, which could be sold during difficult times. But the land was to be returned to the original leaseholder during the jubilee (50th) year. It was the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to buy back, or redeem, the land in the period between the sale of the land and the jubilee year. The practice of levirate marriage, whereby a man's brother married his widow, was different but related to the role of kinsman-redeemer.

RESPOND

Where has God shown you His *hesed* this week? How has living out your faith produced godly blessings to you and your family? Where is God calling you to show grace and mercy to someone: widowed, foreign, despised, and poor? Is there someone you know embittered by trial and difficulties? What will you do to give him or her hope this week?

PRAY

Sovereign Lord, thank You for the hope we have in Your resurrection life. Strengthen my faith so that I can be a blessing to others. Help me to reach out to the "outsider" in my home, church, and workplace with Your *hesed*. I desire You more than anything on earth (Ps 73:25).

- C.M.

READ

Ruth 3:1-18

Psalm 74

REFLECT

Principle: God's plans, ways and timing are to be trusted by His people.

When the two widows came to Bethlehem, their plan was for Ruth to take care of Naomi, eking out a living as best they could. But now Naomi has a new plan: Ruth is to marry Boaz.

Ever since Boaz came into Ruth's life, Naomi has been a different person. Her concern is no longer for herself and her grief but for Ruth and her future. It's this deepening love and concern that spurs Naomi to take the initiative in proposing Ruth meet Boaz on the threshing floor at midnight (vv 3-4). It is the end of harvest; Ruth no longer will have work or contact with Boaz. Boaz is aware he is kinsman-redeemer, yet has not made the offer. What is a mother to do? We know the end we seek, good as it may be, never justifies compromise to achieve it. Rash plans, risky encounters are not what God wants for His people. Man has his plans, but God determines his steps (Prov 16:9). The character of Ruth and Boaz will be fully revealed by daylight.

The preparation Ruth made to meet Boaz is the same preparation believers make to enter a deeper relationship with the Lord. First, she washed herself. Whenever we sin, we are to seek forgiveness and cleansing from God (1 John 1:9), and separate ourselves from whatever defiles us (2 Cor 6:14-7:1; James 4:7-8). The anointing oil (perfume) speaks of the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Putting off the garments of widowhood, Ruth was to dress for her wedding (Is 61:10). Salvation is pictured as a change of clothes (Luke 15:22). Ruth learned she had to present herself to Boaz in uncovering his feet and laying down (v 4). She had to put herself at the feet of the

lord of the harvest, and he would do the rest. God's own are called to fellowship fully prepared (Heb 10:19-25). The final step in preparation for Ruth was her willingness to obey. A willingness to obey the Lord is the secret of knowing what He wants us to do and being blessed when we do it (John 7:17-18).

Even in our day, a woman proposing to a man is rarely done. But this is just what Ruth does as she positioned herself at Boaz's feet and waited for him to wake up (v 7-9). Boaz responds to Ruth by acceptance (v 8-10) and assurance (v 11-13). Imagine the joy at hearing the words, "Everyone knows you are an honorable woman" (v 11). Boaz sends Ruth home uncompromised and with gifts to share with Naomi (v 15-17). What a great future son-in-law!

But there is a snag, as Boaz is not the closest kinsman-redeemer (v 12). At last Naomi and Ruth will put today's principle in practice and 'sit still' and wait (v 18).

RESPOND

What should govern a Christian's actions? How has Christ acted as your kinsman-redeemer? What steps will you take this week to enter and deepen your relationship with God? How has stepping ahead of God in making your own plans backfired? What has God called you to 'sit still' and wait for in persistent prayer? Psalm 74:20 asks God to remember His promises – do you think God forgets what He has promised you?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you are my kinsman-redeemer. You paid the greatest price for me by dying on the cross. Help me to trust your plans and trust them in your time. Guide me to honor you in all I say and do.

- C.M.

READ

Ruth 4:1-22

Matthew 1:5-6

Psalm 75

REFLECT

Principle: Jesus Christ is our Kinsman-Redeemer and no one is excluded from the redeeming love of God.

Our story began with a famine and three funerals. Widowed Naomi turned back to God and experienced renewed hope and love through the care and faithfulness of Ruth. Ruth being chosen (Eph 1:3) by God to have a part in His salvation plan has become a woman loved by Naomi and Boaz and honored by others (3:11). Boaz will fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer, becoming a part of the genealogy of the Messiah (4:21-22; Matt 1:5-6). Sadly, not every story of God's people has such as happy ending.

While Ruth and Naomi wait (3:18) Boaz wastes no time in pulling together a meeting at the town gate (v 1-2), a local place where meetings were held and legal business transacted. As a man of God, Boaz delights in God's law (Ps 1:2) and therefore must seek the legal kinsman-redeemer (Mr. No-name) to fulfill his promise to take care of Ruth (3:13). The first audience to hear this story was on the edge of its seat as the possibility of another redeemer for Ruth sat down with Boaz (v 1) and initially agreed to be the kinsman-redeemer (v 4). Boaz's timing is perfect as he adds the caveat including the young widow, Ruth the Moabite, as part of the redemption price-tag (v 5). The unnamed man quickly decides the cost is too high for him and in taking off his sandals (again with the feet!) gave full rights to Boaz (v 8). Right then and there Boaz redeems his beloved Ruth (swoon) taking her as his wife (v 10). And the town blessed it (v 11-12).

Redemption means "to set free by paying a price." The principles of Jesus Christ as our Kinsman-Redeemer are applied to our spiritual redemption. All people are in bondage to sin and Satan (Eph 2:1-3; John 8:33-34) and unable to set themselves free. Jesus Christ gave His life as a ransom for sinners (Mark 10:45; Rev 5:9-10), and faith in Him sets the captive free. There are three qualifications that Jesus fulfills as our Kinsman-Redeemer: near relative, able to pay the redemption price, willing to pay the price. Jesus became flesh and blood so He could die on the cross (Heb 2:14-15; Phil 2:6-8). The incarnate Christ is our forever Kinsman. Christ is the only one who is able to pay the redemption price; it is His precious blood shed for you and me (1Peter 1:18-19). We have redemption through Christ's blood (Eph 1:7), because He willingly gave Himself for us (Titus 2:14) and purchased eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12).

After they were married the Lord enabled Ruth (barren in her first marriage) to bear a son. Naomi, once emptied by God, now has her hands full and she loves it. The love and care of grandparents are an integral part of God's family design.

RESPOND

Is Jesus Christ your Kinsman-Redeemer? How has God filled your empty hands this week? What would your parents-in-law have to say about you?

PRAY

Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back? For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

- Carole Matthews