

## **God Wants to See Us in Family**

**Ruth 1:16-17, But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”**

## **Once Upon A Time There Was a (Broken) Family**

There was a man, his wife, and two sons who lived in Bethlehem during the time of a great drought. This was the time of the Judges which followed the period dominated by such men as Joshua & Caleb, men of valor who followed God’s law and took possession of the land they had been given. Following their death, however, the ongoing effort to pacify the land seemed unimportant compared to becoming comfortable and soon, “every man did what was right in his own heart.” There was no grand purpose for Yahweh’s chosen people.

So Elimelech, lured by the stories of soil rich enough to grow three crops a year and unconcerned by the requirement to bend his knee to idols, packs up his family, says goodbye to his relatives and close friends to seek his fortune. Surely in Moab where the soil was said to be black, the water abundant, and the gods favorable to farmers, he could find success.

As so often happens in stories like this he died soon after arriving leaving his widow, Naomi in a foreign land with no prospects for remarriage, to raise their sons. The life of a widow was hard enough but to be away from Aunts and Uncles, priests and judges left her desolate but with no means to return to Israel trekking two young boys so she buckled down to make a home away from home.

In the course of events her sons married – and Naomi found kindred spirits in her two daughter-in-laws – maybe life was not so terribly bad. But then, her sons died. How they died is not important to this story but their death meant Naomi was without both protection and purpose in a land that had not treated her with kindness. Her two daughter-in-laws stayed with her through the burials and grieving process but when that was done Naomi determined to return to her homeland from where she had heard reports the drought had ended.

After they have escorted her to the boundaries of their city, Naomi releases her daughter-in-laws from their obligations to her. She thanked them for their loyalty to her family by standing with her in their grief and encouraged them to return to their families and find husbands and have children. She reminds them that she can no longer have children so will not be able to provide them with husbands who can carry on the name of her family. She is talking of the Levirate Law (see Deuteronomy 25) which we find out extends beyond the siblings to the nearest kinsman in Israel.

However, Ruth, whose name means “friend”, refuses and chooses to make Naomi’s family her family. And so they make the thirty day journey together and upon arriving in Bethlehem are set upon by relieved relatives who express joy at having Naomi, whose name means “pleasant” back. But Naomi reminds them of her loss by asking to be called Mara, bitterness and moves back into her house left vacated since her sojourn.

The next day Ruth rises and goes with the other widows and less fortunate to pick through the fields already harvested – something God required the land owners to allow.

In fact the land owner was only allowed to pick once and anything dropped was to be left for anyone who had need. This did not, however, guarantee the safety of young women widows but Ruth had an obligation to take care of her family.

She caught the eye of the owner, Boaz, who quietly instructed his harvesters to leave extra grain from the sheaves for Ruth. He encourages Ruth, first by calling her daughter – no doubt to show his appreciation for how she has treated his kin and then by setting aside a special amount of grain - to stay in his fields only – something the poor would not have done – rather roaming from field to field to improve their chances of finding what they needed. Boaz prays that she will continue to find good fortune and demonstrates his willingness to be God's tool by feeding Ruth with his workers and giving her enough and more to take back to Naomi.

Naomi is thrilled and relieved when Ruth tells her the actions of the day. She is relieved to know that Ruth will now be under the watchful eye of her relative. She is thrilled because the relative is a “kinsman redeemer.” Boaz was one of the people in Naomi's family whose responsibility it was to redeem land sold by his relative who fell on hard times and had to sell land to live. Evidently Naomi had determined she needed to sell her inheritance but did not want to sell it outside the family. Here, now, she begins to see the hand of God at work.

For the next three months Ruth continues to work the fields through both the barley and wheat harvests. At the end of harvest celebration Naomi has a plan. She wants to see Boaz and Ruth get together – but – Boaz is not the closest kinsman redeemer so she cannot ask him directly. She makes sure Ruth is primed and primed – remember – Boaz is used to seeing a girl in the fields not a woman in a parlor. She encourages Ruth to wait until the festivities are over and then to lay at Boaz's feet so that when he awakes she will be the vision he sees.

As with most plans women make to lure men, this one works beautifully. Boaz sends Ruth home so there will be no talk of improper actions between them and promises he will take care of the details. When Naomi hears Ruth's recounting of the story she must have placed her hand on Ruth's face and smiled as she said, “He won't be able to sleep again until he is married to you and we are a full part of our family again.”

And she was correct because that same day Boaz was one of the first to arrive at the gate of the city where the business of the city was conducted. He had a plan. He gathers ten witnesses and then summons the man who is Naomi's nearest relative. This is the man who has first right to the land Naomi is wanting to sell (sell is not the right word because God did not permit sale of the land He gave but it is the word we best understand). When Boaz tells him of Naomi's plans and reminds the man that he is the one to redeem the land for the family thus also enriching himself the man agrees and says he will take the responsibility.

Is Boaz thwarted – will he lose this love he has just found? This is when Boaz reveals his plan. He tells the man he is glad to hear he is willing to accept his responsibility and further congratulates him for being willing to have children with the Moabites to continue the family line of Elimelech. Horrified the man mumbles something about this maybe not being the best investment opportunity and that it could harm his own inheritance. Boaz then reveals his own willingness to do just that.

The elders are impressed by this clever and well played tactic and recognize it for what it was – a plan to have the woman of his dreams while fulfilling his obligation to the generations yet to come. They praise him in the highest of terms.

They compare this union to the one between the patriarch Jacob and his two wives Rachel and Leah (29-35) from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel. They also recognize the poetry in this marriage between Ruth, a widow, and Boaz, the offspring of a family line started from a Levirate marriage between Judah (one of the twelve) and Tamar (Genesis 38:20).

The story concludes with the future. The first grandchild is placed in Naomi's arms and she is told his name is to be Obed, serving, which is an illusion to what he is doing for his Grandma who is once again "pleasant."

Because of Naomi's choice to return to family. Because of Ruth's choice to work for her chosen family. Because of Boaz's choice to accept responsibility for family. Jesus was from a line of workers who did not take hardship as a barrier and saw service to family as a joy as well as an obligation. It was Jesus who puts the finishing touches on this story when he was asked if he wanted to see his family and replied, "

### **Mark 3:33-35**

**"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."**

### **Three Deaths & A New Birth**

Chapter 1

#### **When In Doubt Do What You Can**

Chapter 2

#### **When God Sends a Sign...**

Chapter 3

#### **And They Lived Happily Ever After – Well...**

Chapter 4

#### **Moral of the Story:**

**You don't pick your family - you choose it.**

Ruth chose to be family with Naomi – Boaz chose to be family with Naomi and Ruth

**Family is a Verb**

**Family is work to live**

Ruth worked in the field and Naomi worked in the home and Boaz worked the politics

**Family is work to have relationship**

Boaz made a plan to have a family – Naomi followed God's lead to have a family. Ruth put herself in harms way to have a family.

**Family is work for the family not yet born**

Our Lord's human birth was a result of their choices

### **My Next Steps**

- 1. Memorize Psalm 119:105**
- 2. Recommit myself to my family beginning with \_\_\_\_\_**
- 3. Ask for prayer to find a job.**
- 4. Attend**

### **Memory Verse:**

**Psalms 119:105**

**“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”**

Offering:

Mother Theresa told this story in an address to the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994:

One evening we went out, and we picked up four people from the street. And one of them was in a most terrible condition. I told the sisters, "You take care of the other three; I will take care of the one who looks worst."

So I did for her all that my love could do. I put her in bed, and there was such a beautiful smile on her face. She took hold of my hand as she said two words only: "Thank you."

Then she died. I could not help but examine my conscience before her. And I asked:

What would I say if I were in her place? And my answer was very simple. I would have tried to draw a little attention to myself. I would have said, "I am hungry, I am dying, I am in pain," or something. But she gave me much more; she gave me her grateful love.

And she died with a smile on her face. Gratitude brings a smile and becomes a gift.

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