

Text: Ruth 1-4

Title: “The Right Stuff”

INTRODUCTION

It's been an explosive week, literally and spiritually, in our nation. We have been rocked by violence and by accidents this week, and it reminds us of the need to continually pray for our nation, her leaders, first responders, families, and churches. National Day of Prayer is Thursday, May 2, and we're going to do things a little differently this year. I want to encourage you to pull together a small group at your office, at your school, in your neighborhood, at your gym, or wherever you gather with other people. Invite other believers to pray with you. I've prepared a leaders guide for you so you'll know how to lead the group. We'll have a group meeting here at the church in the Upper Room of the Welcome Center at noon that day. Our nation is broke in ways only God can fix. Let's cry out to him.

Now we're talking about some of the famous couples in the Bible, and also celebrating marriage right here in our own church.

Ed and LaNell Doyle – 51 years

Ed and Laura Gene York – 65 years

Myron and Margaret Jones – 50 years

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Bernie and Barby Hargis – 30 years

Bruce and Peggy Leitch – 31 years

Every marriage is important, and not primarily for the reason that you think. You may think it's important because it is a primary source of happiness for you. But it's not the main reason it is important. As a follower of Jesus Christ, your marriage is important because it is a living advertisement for Jesus Christ.

Open your Bibles to the book of Ruth in the OT. The marriages we've looked at so far are marriages that were a link in the chain of bringing Christ into the world. Today we're backtracking a little. Ruth was the great-grandmother of David, whom we talked about last week. This is one of the great love stories of the Bible ... the story of the marriage between Ruth and a man named Boaz. More importantly the book of Ruth is a love story between God and His people. The story of Ruth and Boaz is a story of redemption. The Hebrew word for redemption in its various forms shows up twenty-three times in these four chapters. God is working out His plan for salvation in Israel and the marriages like the one between Ruth and Boaz will figure prominently in God's plans and purposes.

Again, the same is true for marriages today for believers. Our marriages are to be advertisements of the Gospel ... of the sacrificial love of Christ for His people, and the faithful love of His people for their Savior.

Here's a quick summary of the story of Ruth. It starts with a man named Elimelech who moves his wife Naomi and two sons to Moab (a country just to the east of Israel). The two sons marry women from Moab, one of whom is Ruth. In a tragic turn of events Elimelech and the two sons die, leaving

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law as widows. Naomi decides that she will go back to Judah (Israel), but she encourages Ruth and the other daughter-in-law to go back to their families' home. But in a tender expression of devotion, Ruth says something that is often quoted in wedding ceremonies:

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.”

So you see these words that are often quoted at weddings are actually the words of a woman to her mother-in-law. But they reflect the loyal heart of Ruth.

Naomi and Ruth arrive back in Judah, in the little town of Bethlehem. As widows they are definitely disadvantaged. It is the harvest time when they arrive, and Ruth tells Naomi, “I’ll go and work in the grain fields, pick up some of the grain so we can have something to eat.” In OT times there was the law of gleaning. This means that a landowner would not harvest the edges of his grain field; that would be left for poor people to go and gather some for themselves. Well this is what Ruth does:

Ruth 2:3 - So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech (Ruth’s late father-in-law).

We might say, “As luck would have it.” But the Lord does not do luck! His work is never haphazard. So this is the work of God in bringing these two together. And that’s the way it should be in marriage. When Jesus talks about marriage in the Gospels, notice how he speaks of it:

Matthew 19:5-6 - ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.’

Notice Jesus said, in speaking about marriage, “what God has joined together...” A man and a woman, when they choose a mate, God looks at it as something He has joined together ... two lives that are literally glued together. And when God joins a couple together that union is not to be dissolved except by the hand of death.

Now I want to show you that these famous lovers have the “right stuff” for marriage from the beginning.

Remember that Ruth has become a believer. She said to Naomi, “Your God will be my God.” And we know Boaz was not just a wealthy landowner; he was a man of God. In fact when he shows up to his field on the day Ruth is there Boaz greets his workers:

Ruth 2:4b - “The LORD be with you!” “The LORD bless you!” they called back.

How would like to work for a guy like that? And this is the “right stuff” of a successful marriage:

1. DEVOTION TO GOD

Here's the amazing math of a marriage between two believers:

1 + 1 + 1 = 1. When a man and a woman who are committed to keep the Lord in the center of their relationship get married, there is a powerful union.

So Boaz is a man of God. And he immediately notices Ruth working in the field. He asks, "Who is that young woman?" The workers explain Ruth's sad situation and her connection to Naomi. Boaz calls Ruth over and speaks these words to her:

Ruth 2:8-9 - "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."

Here's more of the "right stuff" that went into the marriage of Ruth and Boaz:

2. RESPECT FOR ONE ANOTHER

Boaz doesn't try to take advantage of Ruth. She is in a vulnerable position. Boaz speaks to her with respect ... "my daughter." That's a tender term. And remember Ruth is not even an Israelite! She's from Moab. But there's still respect. And Boaz is concerned that she be treated with respect by the other men. He said, "I have told the men not to touch you."

Note: Dads, your children are watching you. Boys learn respect for women by watching and listening to their dad. When they see dad open the car door for their mother they are learning the value of respect. And when a daughter observes that in her dad, she learns that that's the way her future husband should treat her.

And you see respect in the response of Ruth to Boaz.

Ruth 2:10 - At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"

ILLUSTRATION - Now ladies I'm sure that's the way you greet your husband when he comes home from work each day ... you bow down you're your face to the ground. Well, maybe not. I did hear the story about a couple of guys who were talking one day, and one of them told about a fight he and his wife had the night before. He said, "When it was over my wife was coming to me on her hands and knees ... She said, "Come out from under that bed and fight like a man." Well there should be respect even when we disagree.

Now in the verse we just read you notice the word "favor." It shows up often in these four chapters. It points us to another part of the "right stuff" in a marriage:

3. KINDNESS TO ONE ANOTHER

Boaz knows all that Ruth has been through, and what she has done for her mother-in-law in loyally staying with her.

Note: For those of you who are unmarried and are praying about the person God would have you marry, take note of this. The way a potential mate treats others is eventually how they will treat you. Ruth had already demonstrated selfless compassion and kindness to Naomi. Boaz was attracted to her for this. Boaz treats his servants with respect when he prays, “The Lord be with you!”

Knowing all that Ruth has been through Boaz said to her:

Ruth 2:12 - May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

And Ruth replies:

Ruth 2:13 - “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.”

There’s the word “favor” again. It means kindness. You see, Ruth had sought refuge in the Lord, and the Lord provided that refuge and safety through her future husband Boaz. The kind arms of Boaz were actually the protective wings of God over Ruth. Guys do you see that? God wants to love your wife through you. God is protecting your wife, and He will use you to do that. God is providing for your wife, and He will use you to do that. If you and I fail at this point, we are not just failing our wives, we are failing God.

Now notice what happens when Ruth returns home:

Ruth 2:19 - Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!” 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.

When Ruth says this, Naomi’s eyes light up. “You’ve got to be kidding!”

Ruth 2:20 - “The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”

Now remember I said that the Hebrew word for “redemption” shows up many times in Ruth. Well, let me explain what is happening here. The “kinsman-redeemer” is a very important person in the preservation of a family name and the family property. The Old Testament Law of Moses provided that if a man died without an heir, the widow of the dead man should marry one of her husband’s relatives (the kinsman-redeemer), and the first son born of that union would become the dead man’s

heir to carry on the family name. And if there was no brother available, a more distant relative might be asked to fulfill this duty. He would become the “kinsman-redeemer.”

It was also vitally important that property remain in the family, even if they fell on hard times and had to sell their land. Again, God’s law provided for this: When this happened the nearest male relative (kinsman-redeemer) would buy back the land for the poor relatives.

In the kind providence of the Lord this next of kin (“kinsman-redeemer”) for Naomi and Ruth was none other than Boaz. Naomi starts adding all of this up, and realizes that God is at work here. She is concerned for Ruth to not be a poor widow all of her life. She has an idea. Listen as I read what happens. **Read Ruth 3:1-4.**

So Ruth does as Naomi instructed. When Boaz had finished his work and his dinner he went to lie down to sleep for the night. Ruth quietly came over, uncovered Boaz’s feet and lies down beside him. **What Ruth is doing here is requesting that Boaz become her “redeemer.”**

You can imagine that Boaz must have been startled when he rolled over in the middle of the night and realized there was a woman lying at his feet. There’s nothing immoral about this.

Ruth 3:9 - “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.”

The story continues. Boaz is agreeable to performing this act of kindness of Ruth and Naomi. But there is one problem. There is actually another relative who would officially be the one to be the kinsman-redeemer. So Boaz said:

Ruth 3:13 - Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

Here is yet another thing that makes for the “right stuff” of a successful marriage:

4. SACRIFICE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Boaz is about to do something very costly for the sake of Ruth. Ruth 4 tells how the transaction takes place. Boaz went to the town gate where important business was typically transacted. It was the equivalent of the town square and the country courthouse. And after some negotiating Boaz steps up:

Ruth 4:9-10 - Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!”

The thing I want you to notice here is the sacrificial love that is at the core of this relationship between Ruth and Boaz.

And Boaz is a powerful OT picture of our Kinsman-Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. This common occurrence in the life of the Israelites was a powerful image of the redemption of God. You see, Jesus accepted His assignment from the Father by going to the Cross and paying the high price for our sin through His death. He redeemed us ... He purchased us off of the slave-market of sin. Our redemption is costly. Boaz had to pay a price. And Jesus paid the price for our sins. Our redemption is transforming. The price that Boaz paid for Ruth changed everything for her.

Titus 2:14 – (Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Now the amazing thing in this is that God has this same role in mind for the husband. Obviously we are not the Savior of our wives. Only Christ can do that. But Christ, having begun the work of redemption in the life of our wife, wants to use the husband to encourage and develop the wife.

Ephesians 5:25-27 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

And what is the role of the wife in this?

Ephesians 5:22-24 - Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Submission means that the wife allows her husband to take the responsibility that God has given him. She trusts God to supply her needs through her husband. Men, if that doesn't put the fear of God in you, I don't know what will.

Well, they all live happily ever after.

Ruth 4:13 - So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

And there's more important information:

Ruth 4:17 - They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

CONCLUSION

And we know that Jesus' lineage is connected to David so that He would be called "the son of David." Little did Ruth and Boaz know that their marriage was a pivotal link in the chain of redemption that would come through Jesus Christ.

So you see, your marriage is important, not just to you, but to what God is doing in this world in presenting Christ and the Gospel. Do you have the right stuff for that?