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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Ruth 1:1-22

9. RUTH

The story is told of Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great literary giant of the 18th century reading a work to a largely agnostic London literary club as though it were a production he had recently written. The club thinking that it was a modern composition was vocal and unanimous in its praise of the manuscript. *But then Dr. Johnston informed the group the story was in fact from a book they all rejected, the Bible.* And the story ? Why it was the book of Ruth. Though only four chapters in length the book of Ruth has long been recognized even by those who don't believe the Bible as a literary masterpiece. But for all its literary beauty and excellence it's so much more than that. Now Ruth and Esther are the only Old Testament books named after women. Esther was a Jew who married a Gentile, Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew, but God used both of them to save the nation. Dr. Graham Scroggie says,

Ruth is like a lovely lily in a stagnant pool. Here instead of unfaithfulness is loyalty, and instead of immorality is purity. Here instead of battlefields are harvest fields and instead of the warriors shout is the harvester's song.

Remarkable for its brevity, its eight five verses are easily read in twenty minutes. Precious for its deep unfolding of the person of God, the truth of redemption, the workings of providence, this charming and beautifully written story is both simple and sublime a gem of literature and a wonder of language. Now there are several things that I want to do by way of introduction to this book.

1. The STUDY of this Book:

We can study this little book from many angles. Ruth may be looked at:

Historically: this includes the history of Elimelech and his family, the departure of Ruth from Moab to the country of Bethlehem, and her marriage to Boaz.

Devotionally: When life's great choice came to Ruth she decided aright, and from that day onward her steadfast path of faith and trust is an outstanding pattern for believers today.

Prophetically: For here we see the Jew set aside temporarily that the Gentile might receive salvation. (Acts 15:14) Naomi's blessing came after Ruth's wedding just as Israel will be restored and blessed after Christ and His church are united.

Typically: For much truth centres around the seven personalities in the Book. Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are types of backsliders from God, whose restoration to the Lord is not revealed. Naomi, is a backslidden saint

who is happily restored to the Lord. Ruth is a picture of a sinner, who through links with believers trusted the Lord. Orpah is a sad type of those who show some interest in spiritual things, but turn back and perish. (Heb 6:4-6) And of course Boaz is a beautiful type of the Lord Jesus as the redeemer and strength of His people. (Jer 50:34) 1,

2. The SETTING of this Book:

For the story of Ruth occurred in the days “ *when the judges ruled,* ” Israel. (1370 to 1041 BC) Thus, this book bridges the time from the Judges to Israel’s monarchy. (10:3-5) Look if you will at (1:1) This was a time of Apathy: for the tribes of Israel failed to go up and take the land and to claim it for their inheritance. (Josh 13:1 Judges 2:10-11) It was a time of Apostasy: in which they departed from the worship of the true God and served Baal. (2:11-13) It was a time of Anarchy: for “ *in those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* ” (21:25) What a period this was. A day of darkness, and disobedience and disgrace and yet amid the darkness there shines this sweet story of Ruth. You see, God never leaves Himself without a witness. The darker the times, the more definite the testimony.

3. The SCENES in this Book:

Are beautiful. For there, are four outstanding scenes in the book of Ruth. **Scene No 1: Moab** (Ch 1:1-18) Period about 10 years. **Scene No 2: The field of Boaz**

(1:19-2:23) Period several months possibly mid April to mid June. **Scene No 3: One day in Bethlehem** and one night at the threshing floor. (Ch 3) **Scene No 4: Bethlehem, the city.** Period about 1 year. (Ch 4) So the book of Ruth in total covers about eleven to twelve years.

4. The SIGNIFICANCE of this Book:

Never judge a book of the Bible by its bulk. Some of the most pungent books of the Bible are the shortest. Ruth has only four brief chapters *but it is a mighty midget with a mighty message.* In fact it has several messages. It gives us a genealogy that leads to the Lord Jesus and it explains His coming from the line of David. (4:18-22) But surely the primary purpose of the book is to bring before us the wonderful truth of redemption. My redemption is only possible through a Kinsman-Redeemer. God could not redeem apart from a Mediator, and since only God could redeem it was necessary for Him to become that person of which Boaz is a beautiful picture.

5. The STRUCTURE of this Book:

Is simple. The book of Ruth contains 4 chapters. We could entitle ***Chapter 1: Weeping***, for throughout this chapter we see nothing but trouble and weeping. ***Chapter 2: could be called Working***, for here we see Ruth serving in the harvest field as a gleaner coming into contact with Boaz her husband to be. ***Chapter 3: is all about Waiting***, for after presenting herself to Boaz and asking him to fulfil his role as near kinsman (3:9) Ruth hears wise counsel from her mother in law, “ *Sit still, my daughter until thou*

know how the matter will fall.” (3:18) **Of course** (**Ch 4**) **ends with the Wedding.** So we go from Ch 1 which is filled with Sorrow to Ch 2 which is all about Service, to Ch 3 which is a beautiful picture of Submission to Ch 4, which is all about Satisfaction. Or to change it slightly, in the opening chapter we are taken from

(1) FROM THE FORBIDDEN LAND

And this chapter is all about **Weeping**. J. Vernon McGee writes “ *the presence of a famine is the telltale mark of flagrant sin and the displeasure of the Lord.*” How strange that there should be a famine in Bethlehem which means “ *house of bread.*” God had set two pathways before His people. The pathway of obedience and blessing, or the pathway of disobedience and cursing. The Lord had promised His people that if they would obey Him, there would be plentiful rain. (Lev 26:4) But if they disobeyed Him “ *the Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust.*” (26:24) Now it was this famine that precipitated,

(a) A WRONG DECISION:

As Elimelech and Naomi, and their two boys travelled east across the hills, on the far side of the Dead Sea to Moab. As time passed each of their two sons married a Moabite woman. *Things went from bad to worse.* Naomi’s husband died and the two sons died also. Now remember there were more men who Bethlehem Judah who faced the same famine as Elimelech. For example Boaz passed through the testing time of famine. Trusting the Lord he

proved the Lord, but Elimelech failed the test and went to live in Moab which became for him the end of testimony, a place of death. Now why do I call this the forbidden land ? Because in its origin, *Moab was impure.* (Gen 19:35-38) In its history Moab was *antagonistic.* When Israel travelled to Canaan Moab refused to let Israel through their land. (Jud 11:17) would not help Israel (Deut 23:4) hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22:1) and then some Moabite women seduced the Israelite men not only to corrupt their morals but to corrupt their worship. The result, 24,000 dead Israelites because of the judgment of God. Then again, these Moabites were *idolaters.* (Num 21:29 25:3) This move was not only dangerous physically but spiritually and yet we read “ *they came into the country of Moab and continued there.*” (1:2) Despite God’s Word which said they were not to mix with the Moabites. (Deut 23:3)

Think of it. Ten years out of the will of God, and what a price they had to pay. Do you know what Elimelech means ? “ *My God is King.*” A king who one is to be honoured and obeyed but as soon as difficult circumstances arrive, Elimelech leads his family astray. Oh, his intentions were good for as (1:1) suggests “ *he went to sojourn,*” live for a while, but in (1:2) we read he “ *continued there.*” He settled down in disobedience. My are you living for self or for God ? Have you embarked on the pathway of disobedience ? Have you taken the first step downward, backward ? I tell you many a professing Christian never had any intention of staying in the world of idolatry and immorality but they “ *continued there.*” Years lost, out of the will of God. Do

you recall what they said, “ *What’s the harm in the first drink, what’s wrong with the disco, what’s the problem with flirting about with the opposite sex ?* ” Do you know something ? They are still in Moab this! Did you notice this wrong decision,

1. Affected the Father:

Look at (1:3) Naomi testifies, “ *I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.* ” (1:21) Do you know what Naomi means ? “ *My pleasant one.* ” But here pleasantness becomes bitterness. My sometimes God has to take drastic measures to bring us back to where we belong. It never pays to rebel against God. Naomi discovered that. Jonah discovered that. Are you discovering that ? 1.

2. Affected the Family:

Look at (1:4) One sin leads to another. Elimelech left Israel to move the 50 miles to Moab and this eventually led to these forbidden marriages.(Deut 23:3) Incidentally, are you forming a relationship which is outside the will of God ? Scripture is very clear about whom we should date and who we should marry. Do you recall Paul’s words ? “ *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.* ” (2 Cor 6:14) And “ *married only in the Lord.* ” (1 Cor 7:31) Elimelech died but in due course Mahlon and Chilion died also and the land of Naomi’s dreams became the land of their despair. (a)

(b) A WRONG DIRECTION:

Backslidden Naomi desires to return home but she is not wise enough to invite her daughters in law to accompany here. Do you know something ? *You need to beware of the advice of a carnal Christian.* For you never find a professing Christian getting into the wrong place without doing great damage to the Lord’s name and work. Imagine Naomi sending these women back to their heathen idols. She thought that their only interests were fleshly but Ruth had higher desires than mere bread and home. Orpah returned to the old life “ but Ruth clave unto her.” (1:14) My Ruth’s statement is one of the literary gems of all time. (1:16-17) Is this not absolutely amazing ? I mean Ruth was a Moabite, a descendant of Lot, a pagan, a worshipper of many false gods, yet we see her turning her back on the gods of her people and putting her trust in the God of Israel. Did you notice Ruth chose five things for her life ?

1. A New Path: “ *Whither thou goest I will go,* ”

2. A New Place: “ *Where thou lodgest*,”

3. A New People: “ *Thy people shall be my people,* ”

4. A New Person: “ *Thy God shall be my God,* ”

5. A New Purpose: “ *Where thou diest*,”

What she was simply saying was, “ *If you die I’ve no intention of returning to Moab and idolatry.* ” She was making a decision that would never be reversed or altered. She would follow to the end. Do you know what that is ? That is commitment. Is this not what we need in marriage ? Commitment. Too many are marrying for better or for worse but not for long. Is that not what we need in service ? Commitment. You see, things get tough

and we want to quit. Is that not what we need in relationships ? Commitment. “ *I will go,*” (1:16) was her steadfast decision in spite of Naomi’s unscriptural direction. Now look there was (a) (b) And then there was,

(c) A WRONG DISPOSITION:

Can you see that day when Naomi and her daughter in law come home ? Two widows, one a backslider and the other a new convert. Do you see (1:19) “ *And they said,*” and they is feminine. The town gossips said, “ *is this Naomi ?*” You see, she was pleasant when she left but when a believer gets away from the Lord you can see it in their face. Listen to Naomi, “ *Call me not Naomi call me Mara,*” which means “ *bitter.*” At the beginning of the (Ch 1) Naomi made a wrong decision, in the middle of the chapter she gives a wrong direction (1:8) by the end of the chapter she has a wrong disposition. She is blaming God. “ *The hand of the Lord is gone out against me,*” no God’s hand was working for her. “ *I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty,*” no. Sin sent out her full and brought her home again empty.

Do you know what bitterness is ? It’s having wrong thoughts about God. Someone says, “ *You don’t understand God has been cruel to me.*” No He hasn’t. My you are judging His hand apart from his heart. “ *God is too kind to do anything cruel, too wise to make a mistake and too deep to explain Himself.*” (1)

(2) INTO THE HARVEST FIELD:

And this chapter is all about *Working*. There is a commercial with an old gentleman advertising for a certain company and he says, “ *we earn money the old fashioned way, we work for it.*” Incidentally, is this not God’s way ? Even the apostle Paul worked so that he would not be a burden to the believers at Thessalonica, (1Thes 2:9) There is nothing wrong with a pastor or a missionary working if the means are not there to sustain them. I mean can you see Ruth ? One day she said to Naomi, “ *Mum I’m going to have to get a job we can’t live much longer this way.*” And Naomi said, “ *Daughter in law you don’t understand we have social security in this country.*”

Now it was a very unusual form of social security. In the book of Leviticus we see God’s way of caring for the poor. (19:9-10 Deut 24:19-22) If the reaper in the field missed some of the grain along the way they couldn’t go back and pick it up. Anything left over in the fields must be left for the poor. This was God’s way of caring for the poor. Naomi says, “ *Ruth you can go if you desire but its hard work.*” I can imagine Ruth said, “ *I’ll do it mum.*” So,

(a) RUTH IS GLEANING:

Now sometimes we hear folk talking of Ruth reaping, but Ruth was not a reaper she was a gleaner. Look at (2:2,3, 7 8, 23) There is a difference. The reapers were gathering in the harvest, the gleaners were gathering in the ears of corn left by the reapers. The reapers were not gathering for themselves but for their Master. Ruth, however was

gathering grain for herself and for the sustenance of Naomi. (2:18) *Now if the reapers represent the servants of God who minister the Word and seek to bring souls to Christ, then Ruth pictures the new convert who needs to gather for herself before she can gather for her Master.* Sometimes young Christians want to go out witnessing right away when they themselves have never ever gleaned yet. They want to feed others when they themselves are terribly underfed. Now gleaning was not a dignified employment but Ruth did it thoroughly and whole heartedly. (2:7) Now let me ask you, how serious are you in your study of the Word ? Let me tell you if you intend to glean from the Word of God it will require diligence, time and perseverance. Someone said to Dr. Barnhouse one day, “ *Sir I would give the world to know the Word of God like you.* ” Barnhouse said, “ *that’s how much it will cost the world.* ” (a)

(b) GOD IS GUIDING:

Did you notice that little phrase in (2:3) “ *Her hap,* ” or literally “ *her lot.* ” From a human point of view it’s just a happenstance a pure coincidence but then God’s children have no accidents they have only appointments. Can you imagine the Lord poking one of the angels and saying, “ *Now watch this.* ” Now there were no fences dividing the fields, only boundary markers. There was no sign that proclaimed, “ *Boaz Incorporated, Visitors Welcome.* ” Can you see Ruth ? She looks to the left then to the right. She says, “ *I think I’ll go to the right.* ” Guess what ? She steps right into the fields of Boaz. About that time the Lord knocks an angel of a heavenly couch and says,

“ *What did I tell you, there she is. She is in the fields of Boaz.* ” Ruth’s heart was right with God, she was marked by sweet submission, she was fulfilling her daily obligations when “ *her hap,* ” occurred. Dr. F. B. Meyer was crossing from Dublin to Holyhead one dark night. He asked the Captain of the ship, “ *how do you find Holyhead harbour on such a dark starless night as this ?* ” The Captain replied, “ *do you see those three lights just ahead ? These must be lined up behind the other in one straight line of vision, and I follow them, keeping the ship in line with the three, until I safely enter the harbour.* ” Dr. Meyer, using the illustration, compared the three lights to the light of God’s Word, the inward conviction of the Holy Spirit, and the divine arrangement of circumstances in the Christian’s life. My the Lord is constantly working **with us** (Mk 16:20) and **in us** (Phil 2:12) and **for us** (Rom 8:28) and accomplishing His gracious purposes. Don’t we have a wonderful God ? A God who guides, overrules and whose providence reaches every area of our lives. (a) (b)

(b) BOAZ IS GOVERNING:

Do you know what Boaz means ? “ *In Him is strength.* ” How good it is to know that God has good people living in bad times. You see, here was a man who was concerned about his workers and wanted them to enjoy the blessing of the Lord. He governed Graciously: He said, “ *the Lord be with you,* ” and he governed Conscientiously: for immediately he saw Ruth he said, “ *whose damsel is this ?* ” J. Vernon McGee translates it, “ *Well, where in the world has she been that I have not met her before.* ” Is that

not how you felt when you met your wife ? I mean this was love at first sight. My he took an interest in Ruth the stranger. (Ex 20:10) Do you ? As an office bearer, a Christian, do you take an interest in the strangers that come into the meeting ? Do you know God's Word, "*be not forgetful to entertain strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*" (Heb 13:2) Do you know what the complaint of 21st century worshippers is ? Its this, they come and go without a welcome. We're all so busy with out little cliques that the stranger comes and goes unnoticed and unwelcome. My will you have a word for the stranger ? For "*a word spoken in season how good it is.*" (Prov 15:23) Scene no one (1) (2)

(3) ONTO THE THRESHING FLOOR:

And this chapter is all about **Waiting**. Now in those days the threshing floor was a very important place. They would take the grain that had been harvested to the threshing floor. The grain would be threshed and then winnowed. Men would sleep at the threshing floor to protect the harvest. Now away back in Moab Naomi told Ruth to find "*rest,*" a husband among her own people, but now she realizes that there is rest with the people of God and in the will of God. Now this brings into play the Hebrew practice of appointing a Go'el that is a kinsman redeemer. This law states that a brother or male relative is obliged to make every provision possible for the family of his deceased kinsman, either by redeeming the widow's property or marrying her. (Lev 25:25) The kinsman of course had to be able and willing to redeem. So the time has come for Ruth to present her claims to Boaz and give

him the opportunity to be her kinsman redeemer. So here we see,

(a) PREPARATION FOR THE REDEEMER:

Did you notice that there were three things that were needed before Ruth could take her place at the feet of Boaz and these things have a clear application for believers today. We must be,

1. Washed in order to Worship:

Look at (3:3) "*Wash thyself,*" this was not ceremonial. Naomi just wanted to make sure Ruth was clean. My if we want to enter into a deeper fellowship with the Lord, we must "*cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" (2 Cor 7:1) My has you feet become soiled ? Has your mind become polluted ? Has your spirit become arrogant ?

2. Anointed in order to Witness:

Naomi says to Ruth "*Get that little bottle of perfume out, you know that one that's called Midnight in Moab, and use it generously.*" My the gracious Holy Spirit is the anointing today. Christ's opening words as He began his public ministry were these, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.*" My if the spotless Son of God needed the Spirit's power how much more do we ?

3. Clothed in order to Walk:

Look at (3:3) In other words “ *Ruth put off your widows garments, and put on that special garment reserved for festive occasions.*” Peter says, “ *be clothed with humility.*” (1 Pet 5:7) Paul says, “ *walk worthy with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*” (Eph 4:12) “ *Ruth dress for the occasion.*” My our dress and appearance are very important subjects and no more so than in this present age. Many believers “ *dress down,*” for church and “ *dress up,*” for work. Are there principles to govern our dress ? Paul says, “ *In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel.*” (1 Tim 2:9-10) The word “ *apparel,*” conveys the idea of a garment that does not accentuate the precise figure of a woman’s body. My does your dress compliment your Christian profession ? Are you promoting sin by the way you dress ? Does your appearance glorify the Lord ?

(b) PRESENTATION TO THE REDEEMER:

For Ruth says, “ *Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid for thou art a near kinsman.*” (3:9) This is not an invitation to immorality but a ‘ *formal proposal of marriage couched in the picturesque language of the time.*’ I heard about a timid young man who wanted to ask his very eager girlfriend to marry him. He finally got up enough courage to call her on the phone. “ *Will you marry me ?*” he said. She replied, “ *Sure, what’s your name ?*” My don’t be that way. Wait on the Lord. Notice what Boaz promises. (3:11-12) He promises to fulfil her

wishes when he has satisfied himself that a closer relative will renounce his right and duty. Boaz Accepted Her: “ *Blessed be thou of the Lord,*” Boaz Assured her: “ *my daughter fear not,*” Boaz Assisted her: he said, “ *don’t go back to Naomi empty handed.*” (3:15) (a) (b)

(c) PROCLAMATION ABOUT THE REDEEMER:

1. Do you see the Proclamation of Ruth ?

“ *And she told her all that man had done to her,*” is that what you are doing ?

2. Do you see the Proclamation of Naomi ?

“ *The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day,*” (3:18) What was said of Boaz could well have been said about Christ. I see Him as they drive nails into his hands. The crowd spits on Him and rails on Him. “ *The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.*” They lift the cross between heaven and earth. The religious leaders scorn and mock Him, “ *The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.*” Nature revolts the birds leave the air, the sun refuses to shine, there is darkness over the face of the earth. “ *The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.*” Out of the darkness and degradation of Calvary Christ cries, “ *It is finished,*” (Jn 19:30) He rests in His finished work of redemption. This chapter begins by Naomi saying to Ruth, “ *Shall I not seek rest for thee ?*” It ends by saying, “ *The man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.*” That brings us to this

final scene of this lovely story. (1) (2) (3)

(4) AT THE CITY GATE:

And this chapter is all about **Wedding**. Do you see here,

(a) *THE BASIS FOR THIS UNION:*

You see, it all centred in the kinsman redeemer. For beyond Boaz we see here our kinsman redeemer in whom we have redemption. The word “*redeem*,” means “*to set free by paying a price*.” To be a kinsman redeemer, you had to have,

1. The Right to Redeem:

In other words you had to be a near kinsman. We read in (Lev 25:25) “*If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.*” Look at (2:1, 3, 20, 3:12-13) So the redeemer had to be a member of the family. Did the Lord meet this qualification ? Well, John tells us, “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.*” (Jn 1:14) The Lord Jesus became man. He became one of us sin apart. 1.

2. The Power to Redeem:

Ruth and Naomi were too poor to redeem themselves but Boaz had all the resources to set them free, for “*he was a*

mighty man of wealth.” (2:1) Did the Lord Jesus Christ meet this qualification ? Was He able to redeem ? Well, the Bible says “*He was rich.*” (2 Cor 8:9) and “*He is able.*”

3. The Will to Redeem:

This other kinsman was willing to redeem the land, but (4:6) tells us that he was unwilling to redeem the lady, lest he mar his own inheritance. He said, “*I must preserve my own name.*” But Boaz was not concerned about preserving his name, his only concern was doing the will of God and rescuing Ruth. How like our adorable Lord. Willing to make Himself of no reputation, willing to take upon Himself the form of a servant, willing to humble himself, willing to die to secure our redemption. (4:7 Deut 25:5) Did you notice that interesting statement in (4:9) “*I have bought.*” It does not tell how much Boaz paid for the land and the bride. But we know the price that our Saviour paid for our redemption. Peter speaks of “*the precious blood of Christ.*” (1 Pet 1:19) What a price He paid, what a debt we owe. (a)

(b) *THE BLESSING OF THIS UNION:*

1. For Ruth there was the Blessing of Fruitfulness:

For in the East the biggest disgrace that a woman could experience was to be barren.

2. For Boaz there was the Blessing of Fame:

Do you see (4:11) ? The word “ *famous*, ” means to obtain a name. Do you recall the nearer kinsman ? He was trying to protect a name. Do you know who he was ? No, and neither does anyone else. But Boaz’s name has lived throughout history because of his redemptive work. Mark it down. God honours those who honor him.

3. For Naomi there was the Blessing of Fellowship:

That baby boy in Bethlehem has changed her sorrow into joy, her bitterness into blessing, her emptiness into fulness. Backslidden believer that’s what the Lord will do for you if you return to Him ?

(c) THE BENEFITS FROM THIS UNION:

You see, the result of the union between Boaz and Ruth leads on to the record of the royal line of Judah, through which David would come, and through David would come, the Messiah. My God’s hand is in control. His hand is guiding, shaping, and directing. Isn’t God’s providence amazing ? God’s name occurs 23 times in this book for He is control. *So that little baby Obed blessed a marriage, a mother, a mother-in-law, and continues to bless us even to this day, because through that line of Boaz and Obed and Jesse and David came our precious Saviour.* What a way to finish this year 2013. Just to realise afresh that **history is His story. “ That the most High ruleth.”** (Dan 4:17) God is still on the throne. Let me personalize it. “ *God is still on the throne: And He will take care of His own: His promise is true: He will see us right through: God is still on the throne.* ” Trust Him.