

As a Kinsman Redeemer

6/11/2011 Ruth 4:1-17

This is the fifth in our series focusing on **character**. As we have discovered, character is the sum of the features and traits that define our personality, that is, who we are and how we live as a person.

For followers of the Lord Jesus, it is important that these character features and traits not only reflect our continuing relationship with God, but also impact on our relationships and dealings with others.

The story of Boaz and Ruth has always had a huge impact on those who have read it. Not only does it give us a vivid snapshot of life in Israel during the times of the **Judges**, but also an insight into some of the cultural practices at that time.

While we do not know the exact time in which this story was set, our best guess is that it was sometime around 1200 BC, and probably during a time of relative peace. What the book of Ruth tells us is that the story followed a period of prolonged drought and famine in Israel during which time Naomi, her husband and two sons migrated to the land of Moab to find a better life for themselves.

Unfortunately, after more than 10 years (vs.4), Naomi's husband and two sons died, leaving Naomi almost destitute, apart from her two daughters-in-law - Ruth & Orpah.

As a result, Naomi decided to return to her hometown of Bethlehem (vs.1) and released her daughters-in-law to return to their families, in the hope that they would be able to find new husbands and new lives.

In vss.16&17 we have that wonderful declaration of love and faith by Ruth: "*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.*"

What an amazingly courageous statement.

Ruth not only committed herself to an unknown future in a foreign land, but she also put aside all her former cultic rituals and practices to embrace a new relationship with the God of Abraham. This new faith direction was based solely on the loving example and gracious witness given to her by Naomi.

When Naomi and Ruth finally arrived at Bethlehem it was not long after the Passover celebrations, which mark the commencement of the barley harvest (vs.22). We can therefore say that their arrival would have been sometime around March/April.

Can you imagine the gossip around the community? After so many years away, Naomi now returned to her home having lost her husband and both her sons. She was destitute and only had a daughter-in-law to help her.

Of even more importance, her daughter-in-law was a foreign woman, a Moabitess. Now, while most people would have looked down on Ruth, because the religion and practices of Moab were very cultic in nature, they probably would not have said anything to Naomi, because she was already so low.

Ruth, however, was aware that much of the responsibility for providing for Naomi was going to fall to her. In those days there was no Centrelink payments or pension, no superannuation or any other social benefits scheme.

All the land and property owned by Elimilech (Naomi's husband) was to be handed down to her sons, however, because they were also both dead, and were without children to inherit the land, the land and property could only be passed onto one of Elimilech's relatives. This system ensued that land ownership could never be taken over by foreigners and so remained in possession of the extended tribal family.

Women in situations like Naomi, because they could not work the land and had no man to provide for them, were reduced to begging or gleaning for a living. Ruth decided to go into the barley fields and glean, in order to provide some food for Naomi and herself. She was both **humble** and **hardworking**.

As you can imagine, this was hard work. The women would follow after the men who cut and bound the barley sheaves. By Jewish law, any single cut stalks that were unbound and lay on the ground were available for gleaning.

Can you imagine spending your daylight hours walking up and down gathering one stalk at a time? At the end of the day the women would take their meagre gleanings home, thresh and winnow the grain, and then store it in clay jars to later grind into flour to bake bread for themselves.

So much effort for such little reward. It makes you appreciate what we have today!

I like what it says in vs.3, 'As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz ..' Was this just luck? No!

This was the hand of the Lord at work in Ruth's life. Because of her declared faith in God, **the Lord became the author of her circumstances**.

Boaz noticed Ruth, and instructed his workers to deliberately leave behind stalks of grain, so that Ruth may gather them. Boaz had been impressed by what he had heard of Ruth, especially her loyalty and kindness to Naomi.

As a result, Ruth spent the next two months gleaning the barley from Boaz's fields, and then we are told she also gleaned the wheat harvest that followed the Feast of Pentecost (vs.23). So, for 3-4 months Ruth toiled in the fields of Boaz gathering enough grain for Naomi and herself to survive for the rest of the year.

All the while, Boaz was aware of Ruth and everyone in the community would have been watching her.

Now, in Jewish law (Leviticus 25:48f), there were special obligations or responsibilities for the nearest relative or kinsman to assist or redeem his family member, if they were in trouble or difficulties - hence the name 'Kinsman Redeemer'.

1] If a man was forced into slavery, his kinsman was to purchase or redeem his freedom.

2] If debt became an insurmountable problem, the kinsman stepped in to buy back or redeem his home so the family could live.

3] If a family member was murdered, the kinsman would pursue the killer and avenge his murder (Numbers 35:12-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-3).

4] If a family member died without an heir, the kinsman could marry the widow and their first son would inherit the property of her first husband, thus continuing his name and legacy. (It was a form of surrogacy - Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

In Ch.2 vs.1 we discover that Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's dead husband. Therefore, being a man of wealth, he was in a position to act as a kinsman-redeemer, marry one of the women, have a son, and thus secure the family inheritance and welfare of the women.

Naomi was obviously too old to have more children, BUT, Ruth was still a strong young woman.

in Ch.3 vss.2&3 we read that Naomi had already figured this out as she unveiled her plan and told Ruth what she must do. Boaz was obviously a kind man of honour and integrity, which is why Naomi chose him.

The way in which Ruth asked Boaz to marry (redeem) her is quite lovely, and reveals some of the customs of the time. Boaz however was not the closest relative, there was another who had the first right of redemption (3:12). Boaz then designed a plan to get him to relinquish his responsibility so that he might marry Ruth.

It was an all or nothing package: Redeem the land **AND** marry the foreign woman. The relative was tempted with the opportunity to take control of the land, BUT, he did not want to compromise himself by marrying Ruth, the Moabitess. As a result, Boaz won the right to redeem both the property and marry Ruth.

The marriage of Ruth & Boaz was a marriage that has had a lasting significance, not just for the nation of Israel, in that Boaz and Ruth were the great grandparents of King David, **BUT**, it is through them that the Lord Jesus also traces his earthly ancestry (Matt.1:5; Lk.3:32).

In a very real way, the Lord Jesus has become our kinsman-redeemer. Under Jewish law, He has taken over the obligations and responsibilities;

1] to set us free, to buy us back, to redeem us from slavery (ie. slavery to Satan & sin)

2] to secure our inheritance and to make lasting provision for us that we may live well for Him.

3] to secure for us His name and His legacy.

In Him we now belong and have our being.

4] on the cross of Calvary He pursued and took upon Himself the penalty of death that was rightfully ours.

In every respect, Jesus has become our kinsman-redeemer and we are now free to live our lives as God intended. In a sense, the nature and character of Boaz, to seek the well being of Naomi and Ruth and redeem them, prefigured the nature and character of the Lord Jesus as He has redeemed us.

What all this tells us today is that the character of God Himself is one that seeks to reach out and redeem us, to set us free, to make us vital and whole.

As we read in Lk.9:56, Jesus said, *'For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.'* and in Jn.10:10 he said, *'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.'*

The very purpose and plan of God for the coming of Jesus mirrors perfectly the very nature and character of God. Just as Ruth went to Boaz and asked him to redeem her, *'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.'* (vs.9) [NB. not in NIV] so we must come to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to redeem us. He is waiting for us every day.

This also helps us to understand what Jesus was saying in Lk.13:34 (& Matt.23:37); *'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!'*

Even then, Jesus was willing to cast his covering over Israel to redeem them, but they would not come. Today, Jesus is waiting for you! Have you yet received Him as your kinsman-redeemer, your Savior and Lord? Have you come to the point of realization that you need the Lord Jesus in your life?

If not, He is waiting for YOU! Just ask Him to place His covering over you now.