

THE ROMANCE OF REDEMPTION
A Devotional Study of Ruth
by Max Frazier, Jr.

No study of the Book of Judges would be complete without examining those rich truths found within the Book of Ruth. This story, which occurs during the time of the judgeship of Gideon, contains one of the best loved stories found anywhere in the Bible. Maybe it is because the story is so familiar that we neglect the deeper truths which are found within the story.

One of the underlying truths of the story found in Ruth is that of the love which God had for us and which led Him to send His only Son to die on the cross for us redeeming us from the bondage of sin. In fact, the Book of Ruth is the only book in the Bible which portrays the kinsman-redeemer. That fact alone should cause us to study more intently this little book of sacrificial, redemptive love.

NO BREAD IN BETHLEHEM
Ruth 1:1

Elimelech and Naomi were from Bethlehem. That name in the Hebrew means, "the house of bread." We are not told why this town was given this particular name, but the Hebrews always equated a name with special significance. We do know from Ruth 2:17 and Ruth 2:23 that both wheat and barley were grown around Bethlehem. Both grains were the staples of life for many of the people who lived there.

Bread has always been the mainstay of life. There is hardly a culture that does not produce a bread-type substance for living. I remember my very first night in Hungary. Boy was I ever hungry after that long flight. There, before us on the table was bread - not American bread with a hard crust and a soft inside, but day old Hungarian bread - hard crust and hard inside. I was soon to learn that bread formed the backbone of the Hungarian mealtime activity.

Even Jesus told us, when we prayed the prayer which we know as the Lord's Prayer, that we should ask that God give us our daily bread. Jesus said of Himself that He was the bread of life and that if anyone ate of Him that they would never hunger again. Jesus knew the importance of bread.

But, why was there no bread in Bethlehem? Because the Israelites had chosen to live in sin, God had sent the Midianites to oppress them. Now the Midianites were a shrewd bunch. They allowed the Israelites to work the fields in the spring, plant the crops, tend and care for them during the summer months, and then when the crops were harvested, they would suddenly descend upon the villagers and plunder the food supplies. The net result was a famine which affected the entire land.

Friends, there is a lesson we must learn in the fact that there was no bread in Bethlehem. God must always punish sin. Our sin will always create a barrier, a wall, between us and God. The fellowship which we have with Him will be severed. The blessings which we have come to expect from Him will not be present. We may not experience a material famine, such as Elimelech and Naomi experienced, but we will experience a spiritual famine in our lives when we choose to live in disobedience.

Friends, a famine of physical necessities is tragic. But more tragic is a famine affecting the spiritual lives of men and women. How we need to safeguard our lives so that we do not become a spiritual wasteland.

ELIMELECH'S MISTAKE
Ruth 1:2-7

As we observed in our last study, things were not going well in Bethlehem, the hometown of Elimelech and Naomi. Because of the hand of God's judgment, the people were suffering a severe famine because of the presence of the Midianites. Food became scarce. People lived in fear. Hope was gone.

Elimelech was concerned about his family's welfare, so they packed their bags and moved to Moab. Now his concern was commendable, but I truly believe that Elimelech's decision was not justified. Let me share the following reasons:

First, Israel had become fixed in the Promised Land and there was no reason to go running to another heathen land. Elimelech should have known that running never produced victory. It only produced sorrow. We have the example of Abraham in Genesis 12. What did he do when he arrived in the Promised Land and found a famine? Did he remain in that place which God told him about? NO! He entered into Egypt because of the famine. What were the consequences of that decision? He was forced to lie to save his own life. He compromised the integrity of his wife. His testimony was damaged for God. We should never leave the place where God has planted us until He tells us it is time to go. And the text never relates that God told Elimelech to go into Moab.

Second, Elimelech's name meant "God is king." Yet by his actions he could not live up to that belief. Elimelech thought he was in charge. He was not sure he could trust God in this situation. He could not fully trust God to supply all his needs.

God has never promised us a bed of roses if we would follow Him. He has not promised that our skies would always be blue. Jesus never said that being a Christian would be easy. But God has promised to be faithful to us and to supply all our needs and to be with us all the time.

Friends, this is a difficult message for us today. We live in an age where we want everything easy. We expect everything to be easy. I have talked with people who have quit jobs because they were too hard. I have visited with students who have dropped

classes because they were too difficult. We live in an "instant" society. Just go into your grocery store and notice the "convenience food" section which keeps growing and growing. Look at the increase in 'fast food' eateries. We want everything to be easy for us.

But the message of Jesus is of struggles and temptations and warfare. Jesus said He did not come to bring peace but a sword. So how do we communicate this message today? I find that too often we do as Elimelech did - we run off to a place where it is easy. How often do we dilute the Gospel in order to attract people. We call this "easy believism." We will do just about anything to accommodate people to Christ. But Jesus is not in the accommodating business. He does not like "Moab mentality." When difficulties arise, God wants us to bloom where we are planted and to trust Him for the beauty which will be manifest.

GOD AT WORK IN GODLESS MOAB **Ruth 1:8-9**

Things have not gone well for Naomi and her family since they had arrived in Moab. To be certain, things started out well. Both Mahlon and Chilion, the sons of Elimelech and Naomi, met and married two Moabite women - Orpah and Ruth. But then Elimelech died and soon both of the boys died as well. Now word came to Naomi that the famine in Bethlehem had ceased (probably due to the great victory of Gideon over the Midianites). Naomi began to make plans to return home. She gathers her two daughters-in-law and shares with them her intentions.

Naomi asks Orpah and Ruth to return to their mothers' homes. She, herself, is going to return to Bethlehem. Naomi then prays for her two daughters-in-law. Now what strikes me, as I study this prayer, found in Ruth 1, verses 8 and 9, is the name of God which she uses. She calls God, Yahweh or LORD (with capital letters). This was the personal name for God. She could have used the term Elohim, which was a more general term for God. But, she didn't. Why did she use LORD?

First, Naomi knew God intellectually. She knew about God in her mind. Many people know about God intellectually. I remember a conversation which I had a few years ago with a couple of leaders in the community in which Marlys and I lived. We began to talk about religion and the problems of the day. Now, both of these men knew about God. They could talk about God from their minds. God was not foreign to them. But they could not talk about God personally.

Second, Naomi knew God emotionally. Many of the cults in the world today claim an experiential knowledge about God. Their concept of God is focused on one emotional high after another. Yet we are admonished not to put our trust in our emotions.

Third, Naomi knew God personally and spiritually. Naomi was on intimate terms with God. She really knew God. Her relationship with God was like that of a marriage. Some of you have met my wife Marlys. A few of you might know some things about her. But I am the only one who can say, "I know Marlys Frazier."

Remember those words of Thomas when Jesus appeared to him: "My Lord and my God." Those are terms of intimacy. Remember those words of Mary when Jesus appeared to her in the garden that first Easter morning: "Rabboni, Master." Those are terms of intimacy. Remember the desire expressed by Paul that he might know Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. Those are terms of intimacy. Friends, may I ask you if you know Christ personally and spiritually today? Are you intimate with Him? Does He know you intimately? Oh the joys of saying, "I know Jesus Christ."

A MOTHER PRAYS FOR HER DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW **Ruth 1:8-13**

A sorrowing Naomi has gathered her two daughters-in-law around her. She has decided to return to Bethlehem to see if she can pick up the pieces of her life. She has nothing more to offer these two young women who are also in the midst of sorrow, each having lost her husband.

Naomi prays for these two young widows who have meant much to her. She prays, in verse 8 of chapter 1, that God would deal kindly with them as they had been kind to her in her sorrow and grief. How does God deal kindly with us?

First, God supplies all our needs so we do not need to worry. Remember these words from the Apostle Paul's pen: And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Jesus told His disciples during His Sermon on the Mount that they were not to worry about what to eat or what to wear or where they were going to live. God understands the daily needs of His children and will provide for them. At times we need to have the faith like that of the little four-year old boy who was being put to bed by his father, who noticed a piece of rope tied to the boy's bed. "What's the rope for?" asked the father. "I'm praying for a pony tonight," said the boy, "and that rope is for the angels to tie the pony to my bed." Friends, God deals kindly with us in supplying all our needs out of His infinite resources in glory. You need not worry about God ever running out of anything.

Second, God provides a way of escape in times of temptations. Allow me to share that great promise from 1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. Even in the midst of her suffering, Naomi knew the presence of God. What a tremendous blessing to know that God will not give us more than we can handle with His help. That truly is dealing kindly with us.

Finally, God will provide security and rest and blessing for us. I am reminded of these words from Isaiah: And the work of righteousness will be peace, And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, And in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places (Isaiah 32:17-18).

All blessings come from God. And, when we trust Him, He will give us rest.

TWO PICTURES OF LOVE **Ruth 1:14-18**

Now Naomi could have forced her two daughters-in-law to return with her to Bethlehem, and thus they could have escaped the snares of idolatry in the land of Moab and been converted to God. But Naomi did not want them to come with her because of pressure by her. No, if these two young ladies were to come with her, then they would have to make a deliberate choice and sit down and count the cost.

Now both Orpah and Ruth loved Naomi. Of this we can be certain. Both had witnessed the grief Naomi had gone through. In fact, they had shared a similar grief. The future looked bleak for these three widows. As we have read, Naomi had heard news that things were better back home. She would leave Moab and return there, hoping to pick up the pieces of her life, at least those pieces that remained. After hearing her initial plans, both Orpah and Ruth committed themselves to going with her.

Then Naomi appealed to their logic. These young women still had their futures ahead of them. Naomi appealed to their minds to stay back in Moab. And here is where Orpah and Ruth showed a different love. Orpah stated, "Naomi, what you said makes sense. I do love you and I wish for you the very best, but you are right, I do need to think about myself and my needs. So I will go back home."

Orpah had counted the cost and was not willing to pay the price of going to Bethlehem. Orpah decided that she loved her ownself, her own country, and her own desires to have a husband more than she loved Naomi.

This is a certain picture of many people today. They will not come to Christ as Savior because they have their own agendas to maintain. They might have a career they want to explore. They might have a boy or girl they want to marry. They might have a sin they want to indulge in. Face it, they want to live their own lives as they see fit. They don't want to face the costs of following Jesus. It was Jim Elliot who said, He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Orpah was a big loser. She returns to Moab. She returns to her pagan ways. She is lost forever from the pages of Scripture. And all because she was not willing to pay the cost.

The entreaty of Naomi made Ruth the more willing to go. She was not really concerned about her own welfare, but she had a deep love for Naomi that caused her to sacrifice herself for her mother-in-law. Ruth had a heart of love. Why could she make this type of sacrifice? I believe the answer is found in verse 17: Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me. Notice the word for God she uses there. It is the same word Naomi used earlier - Yahweh - LORD. Ruth had already come to trust in God personally. She had already become as intimate with Him as had Naomi. Ruth had observed the witness in the life of Naomi. Thus, Ruth was willing to forsake everything to follow the Lord.

A CHANGED NAME **Ruth 1:19-22**

We often hear people use the expression, "My how you have changed! Is that really you?" This often happens when we have not seen that person for quite some time. Within the context of these closing verses of Ruth chapter one, we could say that that expression summarized the content very well. Naomi was going home. She had spent the last ten years in Moab. But she returned home a different woman than she had left.

As Naomi approaches the city of Bethlehem, the women run out and meet her, exclaiming, "Is this Naomi?" There was something very different about this Naomi from the one they had known ten years previously. Yes, this Naomi was indeed different. She was now a widow and had also buried her only two sons. She has returned to Bethlehem, not the woman of prominence she had enjoyed ten years ago, but a woman of sorrow and destitution. And yet, God was at work in her life, and so, there was a change.

Whenever a person has had an encounter with God, our lives are forever impacted and people do cry out, "Is that really you?" I am reminded of that outstanding testimony found in Acts 4:13, where, after observing the lives of the Apostles, even in the midst of persecution, the religious leaders took note that these men had been with Jesus. God always produces a changed life.

I had an Uncle Charlie. He and Aunt Bess lived in Salem, Oregon, where Uncle Charlie worked on a fruit farm. He grew some of the best cherries I have ever eaten. Uncle Charlie came to know Christ as his Savior later in life. Before that time, he was a chain-smoker. But when he got saved, God removed from his life the desire for tobacco. At first Uncle Charlie thought he would box up all his cigarettes and ship them to his brother, my Uncle Benton. But then he reasoned, "if God had told him that tobacco was bad for him, then those cigarettes would be bad for his brother also." So he burned them all. Everyone knew about a change in Uncle Charlie's life.

God is still in the business of changing lives. Yet for Naomi, the workings of God were not pleasant. In fact, she asks that her name be changed from Naomi to Mara, which means "bitter, bitterness." This name expressed the tremendous sorrow in Naomi's life.

The question naturally comes to our minds: Did these sorrowful circumstances ultimately damper her Christian testimony? I believe, as one looks at the evidence within the book of Ruth, that the answer is no. As one reads verse 20, Naomi ascribes the name of Almighty to God. Now this was not the common biblical name for God. In fact, it is found only 48 times in the Old

Testament, with 31 of those times coming in Job. It is first found in Genesis 17:1 where God established His eternal covenant with Abraham. It is also used in Genesis 28:3 in the context of Jacob's wrestling with God. In each of these passages the thought is of the power of God. God disposes as He sees fit, and no obstacle can stand in His way. Yet, also, there is that thought of the compassion of God. God blessed Abraham and Jacob and gave precious promises to them.

Secondly, I notice that Naomi is not bitter or antagonistic toward God. She has graciously accepted what God has done, although she had not fully understood it. Sometimes God must bring us to the point of complete brokenness in order for Him to use us. Although Naomi did not know it, God was about to use her and her family in a very special way that is still bringing blessings to people all around the world.

A WILLING HEART Ruth 2:1-3

Naomi and Ruth have now arrived back home in Bethlehem. There are not a lot of pieces remaining for them to pick up, but they do begin. Of course Ruth knows no one there. In fact, I am sure that she is probably looked upon with some suspicion by the towns people because she is an outsider, yes, she is an outcast being a Moabite. Now I don't know how you might have responded had you been in her situation, but I think I probably would have gone into the house and closed the door behind me and said I needed some time to get settled in before going out among the people.

But not Ruth. She realized that she had a responsibility to provide for the needs of her mother-in-law. The pantry of the former Elimelech-cottage was bare. A debt hung over the property, so any kind of a loan for provisions was out of the question. There was only one thing for her to do. She must go out and work in the fields to secure whatever she could find to satisfy the physical hungers which she and Naomi had.

The Bible always commends honest labor and always condemns laziness. I am reminded of the admonition of the Apostle Paul to the believers living in Thessalonica. He wrote these words to them: For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10). With a heart that was willing to work, Ruth ties on her bonnet and puts on her apron and sets out to find provisions for her family.

But, where should she go? She had no idea of where to go to glean. She had no friends to protect her from the rowdiness which always seemed to be present in the fields. She was new in the community. Who would give her a helping hand? Friends, when I think of Ruth's situation, I am drawn back to her statement in verse 17 of chapter one where she expresses her confidence and her trust in the Lord God. I believe that, as she headed out to the fields that day, she prayed to God asking that He might guide her footsteps to the right fields where she might glean grain to provide for her needs. Oh to simply follow Jesus, even as Ruth did.

Now there is an interesting statement in verse 3. The King James Version expresses it this way, and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz. We might say that this was quite a coincidence. But I believe it happened in answer to Ruth's confidence in God's leading. God directed her to the field of a man who would not only have compassion on her need for food, but also compassion on her need for a redeemer. Isn't that just like God! As He is providing for our immediate need, He is often orchestrating to meet our greater need.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GREETING Ruth 2:4

Abraham Lincoln said, Kindness is the only service that will stand the storm of life and not wash out. It will wear well, look well and be remembered long after the prism of politeness or the complexion of courtesy has faded away. The word "kindness" has its roots in an Old Germanic word which meant "of noble birth." As it was adapted into the Old English, it took on the sense of "compassionate."

Let me read for you verse 4: Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they called back. Notice the words with which Boaz greets his servants, "The Lord be with you!" We can tell a lot about a person from his manner of greeting. We soon discover if he is friendly or not; if he is sympathetic or critical; if he is proud or boisterous. The tone of our voice and the manner in which we speak communicates much about our present disposition.

In the Bible, greetings were the sincere expressions from the inner man. In Psalm 129, the writer relates that those who hate Zion were to be like withered grass which evaporated before the reapers. They were not to hear the words, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord." Remember the greeting with which the angel greeted Gideon in Judges 6:12, The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior. Remember also the greeting of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:28, Hail, favored one, the Lord is with you. Think of our Lord's words of greeting to His disciples as they cowered with fear in the upper room the evening following His resurrection, Peace be with you. One of the marvelous greetings recorded for us in the Bible is that used by the early Christians as they met one another. It was a simple one word statement, Maranatha, but oh the hope it contained as they encouraged one another with the thought that "the Lord is coming."

This greeting of Boaz to his servants has caused me to reflect upon how I greet others. Do I glibly say, "Hi, how are you?", not caring at all how they feel, not interested at all in what is going on in their lives? Can I dare greet them with the blessings of God, as Boaz did with his reapers? Do I want God to bless their life? When I extend my hand to them, does my handshake or my embrace communicate that I honestly care about that person, or am I just going through the motions of courtesy. Sadly, I must admit that too often my words of greetings are merely perfunctory as I have been too involved in my own life. This passage has rebuked me more than once as God has reminded me of the importance of greeting one another with the proper attitude.

So, friends, today I do want to greet you warmly in the name of the Lord and wish upon you the blessings of God.

MOTIVATED BY KINDNESS **Ruth 2:5-13**

If someone were to pay you ten cents for every kind word you spoke and collected five cents from you for every unkind word, would you be rich or poor? Sobering question, isn't it?

In our last study, we noticed the importance of the words with which Boaz greeted those who worked for him. I would like to continue with a few more thoughts from verse 4 for this study. The ones to whom Boaz spoke were the reapers, the hired hands, if you will. It was hard work in the heat of the day to be gathering the sheaves. I suppose it would be easy to get hot, tired, and irritable. Maybe these reapers were thinking that here they were working in the hot sun and what was Boaz doing? He was probably at home sipping lemonade like all the rich people do. The text does not tell us the temperament of the workers, but I can imagine that they would not be much different from people today. In the heat I am sure that tempers flared very easily.

It was into this scene that Boaz gave his greeting. Its purpose was to cheer and to inspire his workers. His desire was to make them feel like their task was very important. He was their cheerleader, if you will. And, by their response to him, these reapers considered themselves fortunate to be working for such a caring man.

I am reminded of the story I read a few years ago in the OUR DAILY BREAD devotional. It seems that a farmer and an elderly gentleman were painting a farmhouse on a hot summer day. They had just refreshed themselves with a cold drink of water and were returning to their ladders when a small boy with only one arm came riding toward them on his bike. He stopped and said, "I live down the road away. Ma sent me to see if you needed some drinking water. If you do, I can go back and fetch it in a glass canning jar." The farmer was about to decline the offer, but his older companion said, "You sure came in the nick of time, Sonny. A good drink of water would do wonders for both of us." The youngster grinned and called out, "I'll be right back. I bet you think you're lucky that I came along!" The elderly man replied, "You can say that again! Now our worries are over. We've got another man on the job." Words of greeting had been turned into words which gave encouragement.

Kindness does pay rich dividends. I believe that Boaz and his attitude toward his workers, aptly illustrate the truth which flowed from the pen of an unknown author: When we treat a person as though he were the kind of person he ought to be, we give him a giant boost toward what he is capable of being. Oh that God might use each one of us in a similar fashion.

MORE ACTS OF KINDNESS **Ruth 2:4-13**

Before we leave our study of these verses from chapter 2, I would like to have us consider three more pictures of kindness which are depicted here. In verse 11, I observe the kindness of Ruth toward her mother-in-law. In fact, it was a kindness which everyone living in Bethlehem was cognizant of. The naturalist, W.H. Hudson, tells in one of his books, about a thrush and a blackbird that always came together, visiting the place where food was put for birds. The blackbird would pick up the crumbs and put them in the thrush's mouth. Then it was noticed that some trap had cut off the thrush's beak close to its head, so that it could not pick up food, and the blackbird was coming to the rescue.

Doesn't that remind you of Ruth. Naomi was an elderly widow. She had no one to provide for her needs. She was a lot like that thrush. Ruth gave up everything that she knew to travel with Naomi to a land she did not know to take care of a woman that she loved dearly.

A second picture of kindness is found in verses 8 and 9, and then again in verses 14 through 16. It is the kindness of Boaz to Ruth. He instructs her to stay in his fields. They were large and she would not need to go elsewhere to supply her wants and desires. He offers her protection from the other workers. And she was free to drink of the water already drawn so she would not have to take time to draw for her own needs.

I am reminded of another story which I think illustrates this heart of kindness of Boaz. At one end of a truck terminal was a coal company with a high fence around it. Nearby was a railroad, and each day several freight trains passed by. The owner of the yard, who was a Christian, threw chunks of coal over the fence at various places along the track. One day he was asked why he did this. With compassion in his voice, he replied "A poor elderly woman lives across the street, and I know that her old-age pension is inadequate to buy enough coal. After the trains go by, she walks along and picks up the pieces she thinks have fallen from the coal car behind the engine. Her eyesight is failing, and she doesn't realize that diesels have replaced steam locomotives. I don't want to disappoint her, so I just throw some pieces over the fence to help her. Friends, that is just what Boaz did, and isn't that just what Jesus Christ has done for us?"

The final picture is found in verse 12 where Boaz encourages Ruth in her faith in God. The imagery which Boaz used would be familiar to those within the agricultural community. It is of a tiny bird snuggling under the wings of its mother when a time of trouble and crisis is imminent. This provides a picture of trust and security. God asks us to take refuge in the shadow of His wings. And, friends, I can think of no greater place to be, can you?

AN UNSELFISH ACT **Ruth 3:1**

The underlying theme of this third chapter in Ruth is that of marriage. It is not played out in the usual way both for our day or even for the day of Ruth and Boaz. But behind the scenes we see God bringing together a man and a woman of His choice who were to play an important role in the redemptive story of mankind.

This marital drama begins with an unselfish act on the part of Naomi. It begins with the question she addresses to Ruth there in verse one: My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Naomi realized that Ruth needed a husband and a provider. She realized that the life Ruth was now living was not the best one for a young woman. Now Naomi could have maintained an attitude of selfishness and could have insisted that Ruth remain with her and continue to provide for her needs. Ruth had done this since Elimelech had died and especially since they had returned to Bethlehem. And, Naomi was appreciative of all that Ruth had done, but she realized that this was not a healthy way of life for her young daughter-in-law.

Selfishness is the downfall of so many people. It was William Gladstone, the great British statesman, who said, Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race.

Friends, God wants people who will share what they have with others. God wants us to share out of our abundance, just as Joseph shared his tomb with Jesus. God wants us to share out of lack of abundance following the example of the poor widow who gave all she had to Jesus. God wants us to share out of our material resources, even as the early church pooled their resources and the Bible says that no one lacked anything. Finally, God wants us to share our faith. Peter and John had no money to give to the paralytic man, but they could share their faith with him. How readily do we give of ourselves and what we have to help someone else?

I find it interesting that the King James Bible words Naomi's question this way: My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee...? This suggests the heart-cry of Christ for those who know the sting of sin and have borne the burden of life. He cries out, in Matthew 11:28, Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

If sinners were honest with themselves, what is the greatest need in their lives? Is it not to find some kind of rest? They are searching for something that will give them some sense of completion, of satisfaction, of peace. Does the world offer any of these? They have found, as we did, that the answer is no. Jesus says that only He can give rest. Only He can give the quiet shelter from the storms of life. Only He can give the quiet shelter and tranquillity of heart that a person needs. Not that all of their problems will be solved when they find Jesus. Jesus never guarantees that. But He does guarantee that they will find rest. Our responsibility is to point people to that rest to be found in Jesus.

NEW CLOTHES FOR A NEW YOU **Ruth 3:2-4**

There is an old adage which states that "the clothes make the man." It means that what we wear had a great deal to say about who we really are. We are often judged by our appearance. Before I step out the door, my wife usually gives the okay on how I am dressed. She will straighten the tie. She might refold the collar. She knows that our personality is often judged by the way we are dressed.

So it was in Bible days. When a woman lost her husband, it was expected that she would wear the clothing identifying her as a widow. Up to this time, Ruth had been wearing such clothing. This was out of her respect for the dead. But time had healed those wounds and Boaz had filled that void in her heart. Naomi urged her to change her clothing from those dark mourning clothes to the brightly colored ones of beauty. This change broke the last thread of Ruth to the past of Moab. She was now completely free from that aspect of her life.

I am reminded of those words from the Apostle Paul, found in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17: Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. When we receive Christ, we receive a new nature. Our lives are transformed. To use that beautiful analogy, we change from an ugly caterpillar into that of a beautiful butterfly. As a result our links with our past life are broken and gone as long as we let His life flow in and through us.

Truly the Christian life is a life of freedom. It is a freedom we have in Christ. As a caterpillar is bound to the earth by crawling, so a butterfly is destined to soar into the heavens. As a sinner is bound by his sins, resulting in his death, so the believer is freed from the shackles of his sins and soars into the kingdom of light.

Friends, are you still wearing those garments from your past? Or are you wearing those brilliant garments given you by Christ? Paul reminded those believers in Ephesus that they were to put off the old garments and to put on Christ and those garments which He supplies. When we do so, God does turn our mourning into dancing, as the psalmist relates to us.

When Ruth changed her clothes, it was a turning point in her life. When we change our old life for the new life in Christ, that also is a turning point for us. I trust that you have made that change.

A VERY UNUSUAL WEDDING PROPOSAL **Ruth 3:6-15**

I remember so very clearly that time when I asked a certain young lady whom I was deeply in love with to be my wife. We had been dating for two years and knew that God had brought us together. I remember taking her out to dinner and later that evening proposing to her. It was the evening of June 30, 1968. Of course, she said yes, which made me feel greatly relieved. We entered

the home of her parents and told them. They rejoiced with us as did my family the next day when we shared with them.

Now I enjoy reading the stories of how others have done this proposal thing. And many are very creative. But this account in Ruth is among the most creative of all. And its roots lie deeply buried in an obscure passage in Deuteronomy 25, verses 5 through 10. There we read, If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.

This passage is describing what is known as the levirate marriage. The concept was wrapped up in the land. Land, in Israel, belonged to the family. So, when a person died without heirs, the question remained concerning the land. The concept of the levirate was to raise up heirs for the purpose of receiving the land of the deceased.

Ruth was attempting to urge Boaz to fulfill his role as the levirate. By going and uncovering Boaz's feet and lying at his feet, Ruth was making a proposal to him for marriage. Boaz had been dragging his feet because of the closer relative to Ruth and did not want to interfere if they had a relationship established. Now Boaz could definitely see that Ruth was only interested in him.

Boaz responded by covering Ruth with his cloak. This was the Eastern way of saying, "Yes, I will marry you." Thus the wheels were set into motion for one of the most unusual wedding ceremonies in all of Scripture. But, before that could occur, another event needed to happen. That will be our study tomorrow.

WHAT IS A REDEEMER? Ruth 4:1-22

Here, in this fourth chapter, we have one of the clearest descriptions in all of the Old Testament, and perhaps in all of the Bible, of the requirements and duties of a redeemer. In the person of Boaz we find a picture of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.

As a person carefully studies this chapter, a discovery is made of five traits which a person had to possess in order to be called a redeemer. Each day this week we shall look at one trait.

The first requirement was that the redeemer had to be a close relative. Ruth 2:1 and Ruth 2:20 both state that Boaz was a close relative of Elimelech. Tradition claims that Boaz was a nephew of Elimelech. Tradition also states that the "barefoot kinsman" was probably a brother of Elimelech. Boaz had no relationship by blood to either Ruth or Naomi. It was the family estate of Elimelech and his son, Ruth's husband, which was in need of a redeemer.

Ruth was excluded by the Law from being a part of the family of Israel. We read these words in Deuteronomy 23:3, No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord. The only way Ruth could become a part of the family of Israel was through the act of being redeemed. And that act could only be accomplished by a close relative.

Friends, Jesus Christ is our close relative. Listen to these words from the pen of the Apostle John: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

Then, here are similar words from the Apostle Paul: Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

These verses declare that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. In the Garden of Eden, man sought to be like God and failed. In the sinful world, Christ sought to be like man and succeeded. God became a close relative to us that He might redeem us.

Friends, there could have been no real redemption if Christ had not become our close relative after the flesh. An angel could not have secured our redemption. An ordinary man could not have done it either. It took God in the form of man to make it available to us.

WHAT IS A REDEEMER? Part 2 Ruth 4:1-22

In our last study we acknowledged that in order for a person to become our redeemer, he had to first be a close relative to us. Boaz was this for Ruth, and Jesus Christ became this for us.

The second requirement was that the person had to be willing to act as a redeemer. It is obvious from reading this fourth chapter of Ruth, that Boaz was very eager to redeem Ruth. The other closer relative never exerted any initiative in the matter of redemption. He knew that Naomi was back from Moab. He knew that the property of Elimelech needed redeemed. But the text

tells us that he was only willing to redeem a portion of that which belonged to Elimelech. He was not willing to redeem Ruth, for we read in verses 5 and 6, Then Boaz said, "on the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

According to the Old Testament Law, there was no compulsion placed on the redeemer. The act of redemption was solely in the hands of the redeemer. The only motivating force was the attitude of the redeemer to those being redeemed. The closer relative had no strong desire to fulfill that role, but Boaz did.

Jesus Christ was willing to be our redeemer. We read these words from the Gospel of John, No one has taken it (speaking of His life) away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father. (John 10:18). In Matthew 20 and verse 28, Jesus told His disciples, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

The message which echoes loudly and clearly from these verses is that Jesus Christ willingly laid down His life for us. He was a willing redeemer. Why did Christ die for us so willingly? It was because of His great love for us. Why not recite with me those familiar words from John 3:16, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Christ redeemed us because of His love for us, just as Boaz redeemed Ruth because of his great love for her.

Father, How can we not praise You for Your love. We are reminded of the great demonstration of Your love as we see Jesus dying upon a cross for us. He bore the penalty which was due us. He died that we might live. We sing with the hymn writer, "Amazing love, how can it be? That You, my God, should die for me?" For this we give You praise in Christ's name. Amen.

WHAT IS A REDEEMER? Part 3 **Ruth 4:1-22**

So far in our study of this great chapter, we have observed that in order for a person to become a redeemer, two conditions had to be met. First, he had to be a close relative; and second, he had to be willing to become a redeemer. Boaz met both of these requirements in his becoming Ruth's redeemer, and Jesus Christ met both when He became our redeemer.

But there is a third requirement which had to be met as well. The person seeking to become a redeemer had to possess the ability to accomplish the redemption. Now Boaz was capable of being the redeemer for Ruth for the following three reasons. First, because he was a man of wealth, he could pay the price. Second, because he was a man of valor, he was strong enough to enforce his claim. And third, because he was a man of the law, he could fulfill all the legal requirements. Boaz possessed the power to redeem and he exercised that power on behalf of Ruth. The Law had kept her out, but he used his abilities as a redeemer to set her free from the power of that Law.

Jesus Christ was capable of being our Redeemer. Let me share some verses from John 10: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep....I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I have received from My Father...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:11, 14-18, 27-30).

In these verses, Christ is set forth as the Shepherd who has the ability to redeem. At least three times He emphasizes that the Shepherd will die for His sheep. He also emphasizes the fact that His death for the sheep will not only be a willing death, but a death over which He has the power. Furthermore, the redemption is a mighty redemption in that the sheep will never perish. This passage reveals the extent to which God is willing to go to redeem lost sinners - it is an infinite extent.

WHAT IS A REDEEMER? Part 4 **Ruth 4:1-22**

This fourth requirement in order for a person to become a redeemer is one that is often overlooked, and yet it is vitally important for the success of the redemption. It is the requirement that the person seeking to become a redeemer must be free himself. He could not be encumbered with the same problems which plagued the person being redeemed.

In the case of Boaz and Ruth, that meant that Boaz had to belong to that part of the family which was not in trouble. Yes, indeed Boaz was free to become a redeemer. He was free according to the Law. He had done everything which the Law had specified. He was free according to his character. He was already a member of the family of Israel. He was free according to his wealth.

Whereas Ruth and Naomi were encumbered with debt, Boaz had none. Whereas Ruth and Naomi were saddled with cares for which little relief could be found, Boaz could provide the relief for those cares. And act, he did.

This fourth requirement sets forth some of the greatest truths concerning the Lord Jesus. He was truly free from the curse of the

law. Jesus Christ knew no sin. He was never implicated in man's sin in any way. Listen to these words from Jesus as He shared some closing thoughts with His disciples that evening before He was betrayed. He said to them, I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me (John 14:30). There were no skeletons in Jesus' closet. There were no rumors which He sought to avoid. There were no errors which He had done in His ministry. As hard as Satan could, there could be found no fault in Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews also echoes that same thought when he writes, For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Was Jesus ever confronted with temptations similar to the ones which attack you and me today? This text assures us that those temptations did occur, but Jesus never succumbed to them. He never yielded to sin. He was victorious over sin every moment of His life.

Friends, Jesus Christ is the only person who could accomplish our redemption. I could not have redeemed you, because I am in the same boat you are - the boat of a sinful nature. A sinner cannot redeem a sinner. Only the perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God could take away the sins of the world. Let's take a few moments just to praise Him for His sacrifice.

WHAT IS A REDEEMER? Part 5 **Ruth 4:1-22**

Today we come to a close in our study of this great love story. There is yet a fifth requirement for a person to become a redeemer and that is the ability to pay the price required for the redemption to take place.

Boaz was able to pay whatever the price was in order to redeem Ruth and the property which belonged to Elimelech. His bank account contained sufficient funds to make the transaction a reality.

Jesus Christ was able to pay the price which God demanded for redemption. Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Peter expressed this similar thought with these words: knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Redemption by blood has been abhorred by the natural man since the time that Cain brought the lovely fruit of the cursed ground as a sacrifice for his sin. It is continued today by the modernism which states all that is necessary is to strive to be like God.

But Leviticus 17:11 informs us that it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. And the writer of Hebrews proclaims that without the shedding of blood there can be no redemption (Hebrews 9:22). The shedding of the blood of animals is a substitution for the one making the sacrifice.

But why do we need a substitute? The Bible tells us that the soul that sins shall die. This places every man under the sentence of death because the Bible also states that the wages of sin is death. The only hope for man is to get someone to pay the penalty for him which would be satisfactory to God. No man can redeem himself. The price is too great. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can and did purchase our redemption.

Boaz not only redeemed Ruth, but married her and the offspring borne to them became the ancestors of the great King David and of the greater King, the Lord Jesus. And, friends, not only has Christ redeemed us, but He, too, has married us and through us raises up offspring who also will come to know the name of Christ.

For our closing time of prayer today, let's use the words of the hymn writer who states: Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it; Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Redeemed through His infinite mercy; His child and forever I am. Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Amen.