

Seeing Jesus in Every Story

**“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;
and these are they which testify of Me.”**

John 5:39

Act 8

Ruth and Her Redeemer

Ruth 1–4

Prologue

We love a happy ending, don't we? A great story can take us through danger, trouble and all manner of human tragedy but we long to see resolution in the end. The story of Ruth gives us all this and more. We can read it as a classic love story and come away satisfied. But read it with an eye to see Jesus and be swept off your feet by the One who declares:

“I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, and you are Mine.”

Isaiah 43:10

Do you believe with all your heart that God's plans for you are filled with lovingkindness even when you can't trace the finger of His ways? Or maybe, like Naomi and Ruth, you have had moments—even seasons when you wonder if your happiest days are behind you. Who would have dreamed what God had in store for a penniless widow in a foreign land? But God's gifts always put man's best dreams to shame.¹

Cast

Boaz, Ruth, Naomi

Read Ruth 1:1-5 and Ruth 4:14-17. Briefly note what stands out to you at first reading. Be prepared to share one of your impressions with your discussion group.

1. When a famine came, Elimelech left the Promised Land and took his family to Moab. How did his short-term solution become a long-term problem for Naomi?
2. What great blessing did the Lord have in store for Naomi? Who did her grandson grow up to be?

¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Scene 1: Where You Go, I Will Go – Ruth Ch. 1:6-22

Sometimes God's kindness comes disguised in hard circumstances. With her sons gone, Naomi is bereft of hope or happiness. She has no covering, no one to make the decisions or take the lead. In this scene, Naomi learns that the famine is over and decides to go home to Bethlehem.

1. Ruth and Orpah intend to go with Naomi but she tells them to go home to their families. Her own future looks bleak and she has nothing to offer them. Listen to her words in the verses listed below and do your best to explain what she is telling them:

- vv. 8–9:

- vv. 10–13:

2. Read v. 14 and give some thought to each daughter-in-law's response. Both loved Naomi; what do you think made the difference in their choices when faced with the same decision?

- Orpah kissed her:

- Ruth clung to her:

3. As you read through Ruth's answer in vv. 16–17 is she expressing devotion to more than her beloved mother-in-law, Naomi?

- For additional insight, compare Ruth's statement with the covenant God made when He brought the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 6:6–7). What is Ruth laying hold of?

4. When Naomi arrives home with a foreign daughter-in-law the whole town is stirred. Her friends barely recognize her and Naomi doesn't try to put on a good face. How does she view her circumstances? After each statement below, finish the sentence with a phrase to indicate what Naomi was expressing. The first one is given as an example.

- "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." God . . . *hasn't been kind to me.*

- "I went away full and the Lord brought me back empty." God . . .

- "The Lord has testified against me." God . . .

- "The Almighty has afflicted me." God . . .

Additional thoughts and observations

Can you relate to Naomi? We have moments or seasons when, like Naomi, we say, “Call me Mara” (bitter). Where do we go when life breaks apart and shakes our confidence in God’s good intentions for His children? His Word will bring His ways back into focus for us. Perhaps you need a word—if not for today, tuck it into your heart for later. Jot a thought next to each one.

- Jeremiah 31:3
- Psalm 103:8–14
- Psalm 94:17–18
- Hebrews 12:11–15
- 1 Peter 4:12–13

God loved Naomi so much He drew her back home even when she was blaming, instead of blessing Him. She felt like she had nothing at this point, but if you’ve read ahead you know that God was preparing to rain His kindness into every withered fiber of her soul.

Scene 2: Ruth Meets Her Redeemer – Ruth 2

God weaves His plans using threads of everyday life. We are busy with ordinary activities which God works into His own perfect purpose. In this scene Ruth goes out to glean in a field unaware that the wealthy landowner is a distant relative of Naomi.

1. While Ruth was gleaning, Boaz came to the field. What character qualities do you notice about Boaz just by the dialogue he has with his workers?

- v. 4–5
- v. 15–16

What qualities do you notice about Boaz by his conversation and acts of kindness to Ruth?

- v. 8–12
- v. 14

2. At the end of the day, Ruth returns home with a generous amount of grain. When Naomi learns where Ruth had gleaned, what does she begin to realize . . .

- About Boaz:

- About God:

3. It's been said that a "coincidence" is when God chooses to work anonymously. Ruth went into the field that morning with no idea she would meet her future husband. Can you look back and see God's unmistakable hand in a particular circumstance or event of your life, even though you weren't aware of it at the time? Briefly describe how that encourages you to trust God's plan for you.

Explore key words and phrases

Kindness is a key theme running through this story. So far we have seen:

- Kindness in Ruth's devotion to Naomi as she leaves everything behind to take care of her.
- Kindness when big-hearted Boaz makes sure that Ruth, a destitute widow from Moab, feels welcome and safe among the workers in his field.
- Kindness when Boaz ensures Ruth will have more than enough to glean and how that simple act of kindness begins to restore Naomi's hope.

All of this makes for a beautiful love story doesn't it? But where is it taking us? In two more chapters we will see Ruth's happy ending and that will be nice. But remember, we're reading the greatest love story of all—God's unfolding drama of redemption. And in the telling, the Lord kindly waits for us to see Him for who He is. In a word, He is kind.

One of the most important words in the Old Testament is *chesed* (kěss-ed). In older Bible translations the word is lovingkindness. It expresses grace, mercy, faithfulness, loyal love. God's *chesed* is an essential part of His character. God's covenant with Abraham and his descendents is sealed by His *chesed*. The Lord was with Joseph and showed him *chesed* through all his suffering. Showing Moses His glory, the Lord described Himself as abounding in *chesed* and keeping *chesed* for thousands (Exodus 34:6–7).

God's *chesed* shows His mercy and compassion. It is His steadfast love that covers all He does and endures forever. As you continue reading Ruth's story, watch for God's *chesed*. See what the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord will do.

Scene 3: Spread Your Covering – Ruth 3

Ruth gleaned in the fields from late spring until mid-summer. The days were long but God was providing for them and she was grateful. Naomi was grateful too. The kindness Boaz had shown Ruth was healing Naomi's heart. Hope came in. And now that the harvesting season was over, Naomi was thinking of a plan.

For this scene, would you please help set the stage? Answers for the first two questions aren't found in Ruth Ch. 3. You may want to consider them before reading this chapter.

1. When Elimelech took his family to Moab, he would have sold or abandoned his field. We think of land as property to be owned but for Israel it was an inheritance. God owned the land (Leviticus 25:23) and each tribe was given a portion to possess and pass on through their families. So while we think of ownership as holding title to land, they saw land as holding claim to God's promises. Also, land wasn't sold in the way we think of—it was pawned and the law provided the right to redeem it back.
 - Try to put yourself in Naomi's place. Think of her heritage; her family; her home; her future; her inheritance. What had she lost? What would a redeemer mean to her?
 - Try to put yourself in Ruth's place. She was a destitute widow. She was a foreigner. She yearned for a life she couldn't attain on her own. What would a redeemer mean to her?
2. What was a kinsman-redeemer? Give a simple explanation based on reading:
 - Deuteronomy 25:5–6
 - Leviticus 25:23–25

(Thanks for help setting the stage. Now you can enjoy reading the chapter straight through.)

Hope motivated Naomi to send Ruth to the threshing floor that night. She knew that Boaz was qualified but not obligated to be their kinsman-redeemer. She also knew that Boaz was a rare man of integrity who lived to honor God in a time when everyone did what was right in their own sight. Boaz had treated Ruth with the utmost kindness and respect and Naomi could trust him to do the right and honorable thing.

3. Look back at v. 9 – simply put, what was Ruth asking Boaz to do?
 - How did Boaz respond? What does this say to you about the sort of man he was?
4. Can you just see Naomi and Ruth's early morning conversation in vv. 16–18? What do you make of Naomi's last bit of instruction? It's not a trick question—just give it some thought.

Scene 4: Redemption and Restoration – Ruth 4

In this scene, Boaz goes to the city gate where daily business and legal matters are conducted. And it just so happens that the very man he needs to see walks by. (Insert anonymous God sighting here.)

1. What do you notice about the skillful way Boaz presents the opportunity to this unnamed relative?

- What is the man's first response? Why does he change his mind?

2. As kinsman-redeemer, Boaz vowed to "perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance". This particular responsibility made the opportunity a deal-breaker for the unnamed relative.

So now Boaz is free to marry Ruth and we can move on to the rest of the story right? Wait. Something else happened at the city gate and it's so incidental we could easily miss it. Why did the closer relative take a pass on helping Ruth and Naomi? *It wasn't to his advantage*. He did what he thought was right in his own eyes.

- On the other hand, Boaz was doing the right thing . . . in whose eyes?

- What does it say about Boaz that he willingly paid the price required to redeem another man's inheritance and perpetuate a lasting name for him?

- By the way . . . what was the name of the relative first in line?

3. So Boaz takes Ruth for his wife and she bears him a son. And what about Naomi?

- What has God's kindness (*chesed*) accomplished for her?

- In what way has Ruth been "better than seven sons" for Naomi?
(Hint: The number seven was symbolic of completeness and perfection.)

Additional thoughts and observations

What if we could sit with Naomi today? What could she tell us about the Lord's kindness through bitter seasons and happy endings?

The Lord restored her hope and comforted her with more family and blessings, but she would surely remind us that the happiest of happy endings is yet to come. In a thought or two, share what Isaiah 25:8–9 tells us about the happiest of all happy endings.

Intermission: Pause – Ponder – Pray

**All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness
for those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.**

Psalm 25:10 (ESV)

As you memorize this passage, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a good cup of tea . . . satisfying as it is savored. So give yourself time to savor God's Word. Write the scripture in the space provided and meditate on what it says.

Ask the Lord to open your eyes and increase your understanding. Jot down what He points out to you; keep returning here and adding your thoughts throughout the week.

Ponder what this says about God. Consider His character, attributes, work, promises . . .

Consider how the Lord walks you through His paths—even difficult ones—with steadfast love.

Write your response to Him in worship and praise . . .

Epilogue: Seeing Jesus in the Story

Search to See . . .

How does the book of Ruth point to Jesus? Our focus shifts to Boaz, a man who lived to honor God in a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. As it turns out, Boaz has been the central figure in this story all along. The story began with a bitter Naomi and by the end she is a blessed Naomi. “What made the difference? Three chapters of Boaz.”²

1. In Boaz, we see kindness that softened Naomi’s heart to see her bitter assumptions about God were wrong. She went from blaming God to blessing God! Take these verses to heart and express what the Lord’s kindness has done for you.
 - Titus 3:4–5 NLT – *When God our Savior revealed His kindness and love He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done but because of His mercy . . .*
 - Romans 2:4 HCSB – *Do you despise the riches of His kindness, restraint and patience, not recognizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*
2. Boaz spread the corner of his garment over Ruth, became her kinsman-redeemer, and brought her into his family. How does this point to what Jesus has done for us?
 - Isaiah 61:10
 - Isaiah 43:1
 - Galatians 3:26–29

² Excerpt from David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page* (Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2013) p.62

Consider the Big Picture . . .

How does the story of *Ruth and her Redeemer* play into the glorious telling of God's grace? Ultimately it's about redemption and our Redeemer! A few thoughts to consider:

- Boaz was worthy to redeem; Jesus was worthy to redeem (Revelation 5:12 & Ephesians 1:7).
- Boaz paid the cost of redemption; Jesus paid the cost for our redemption (1 Peter 1:18–19).
- Boaz redeemed a foreigner; Jesus redeemed Gentiles into God's family (Galatians 3:13–14).

Make it personal . . .

- It wasn't enough for Ruth to simply know that Boaz was a worthy redeemer—she needed to come put herself at his feet and ask for his covering. She needed to hear him say, “Do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask . . . as the Lord lives, I will redeem you.”

Have you come to Jesus, the only one worthy to redeem you? If not, why not? Will you come and put yourself at His feet? Ask Him to cover your sin and wrap you in His robe of salvation.

- For you personally, what is the most significant insight you've gained from the story of *Ruth and Her Redeemer*? How will you apply this insight in your life?

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