



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for March 28, 2010
Released on Wednesday, March 24, 2010**

“Acceptance in Community”

Lesson Text: Ruth 2:5-12; 3:9-11

Background Scripture: Ruth 2, 3

Devotional Reading: Romans 12:9-18

Ruth 2:5–12

5 Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:

7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

12 The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Ruth 3:9–11

9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.

11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to show how God used Boaz and directed Ruth’s steps so that she could find belonging in strange places in a foreign land.

Principle: to know that when we follow the God of Israel, we will always find a warm welcome.

Application: to show that in order to find complete acceptance, we must trust the God of Israel.

INTRODUCTION

In order to be accepted, a person usually has to conform to what he finds all around. But when he is in a foreign land, it is much harder. It often takes another discerning individual to help that person transition into becoming part of the new community.

Every year as the new school year begins, students face excitement as well as trepidation. There is excitement, because they are moving on to another year. There is also fear, because they may not fit in, especially if it is a new school.

To live in a community is automatic, but to be accepted by the community is an entirely different matter. Who has not felt the icy rejection of a community for a newcomer? Our lesson this week will investigate how a person can move from being an alien to being an accepted part of the community.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: about 1120 B.C.

Place: Bethlehem

Last week's lesson was from the first chapter of the book of Ruth. It focused on the family of Elimelech as it experienced famine, a move to a foreign land, marriages, and deaths. The emphasis shifted to the three women who survived, and the famous statement of devotion by Ruth was the concluding verse: that Ruth would be loyal to Naomi and to her God.

The two women successfully made the journey to Bethlehem. As today's lesson opens, they have arrived in early spring, just as the barley harvest was ready to begin (Ruth 1:22). This fact provided Ruth an opportunity to obtain food.

RUTH ACCEPTED AS A PERSON (Ruth 2:5-12)

1. How was God's providence seen in the time of year Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem?

Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, had returned to her hometown of Bethlehem after a tragic sojourn of at least ten years in Moab. She had lost her husband and two sons. She was a pathetic figure as she arrived with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth. So bereft of hope was she that she asked that she no longer be called "Naomi" (pleasant) but "Mara" (bitter) (1:20).

The Lord was nevertheless directing events to ease her distress and bring glory to Himself. The women arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). Barley was the most plentiful, and therefore the cheapest, grain in Israel. It provided feed for animals and bread for the poor. Though not the most desirable food, it provided something for the two widows to eat.

2. What provision did Israel's law make for the poor at harvest?

Ruth, who had committed herself to supplying Naomi's needs, suggested that she might do so by gleaning in the barley fields. Israel's law gave the poor the right to glean any grain that had been left along the edges of the fields. Harvesters were commanded not to go back for grain that remained after they cut and bound the stalks. They were not to return a second time to recover what they had missed (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21).

Though this was a law, not all farmers observed it willingly; some even tried to evade it. Ruth hoped she might find one who was agreeable to her gleaning. Providentially,

she entered the portion of land belonging to Boaz, a wealthy landholder and a relative of Elimelech.

3. How was Ruth's diligence in the barley field observed? (Ruth 2:5-7)

When Boaz entered the field, he noticed Ruth as someone he did not recognize; so he asked the foreman of the harvesters who she was (Ruth 2:5). "Whose damsel (young woman) is this?" may indicate that Boaz thought she was someone's servant girl, but more likely he was seeking information about her family connections.

The foreman replied that Ruth was the Moabite girl who had returned with Naomi. No further explanation was needed, for news of Naomi's return had spread widely in the community. So Boaz knew Ruth's story, though he had not met her.

The foreman then told how Ruth had come and asked permission to glean. Although the law permitted gleaning, she, a foreigner, did not take it for granted. She showed deference to the wishes of the landowner. The fact that the foreman had let her do so shows that Boaz freely allowed gleaning on his lands.

The foreman also took note of her hard work, describing how she had kept at it continuously all morning. Harvesting normally started early in the morning to take advantage of the cooler temperatures. Ruth had apparently arrived early and worked steadily, taking only one short break.

The phrase "she tarried a little in the house" (Ruth 2:7) has been interpreted in different ways. It could refer to the house where she and Naomi lived, but more likely it means a hut, or shelter, in the field where workers could rest. Ruth had spent a brief time there, but the foreman emphasized that she was a diligent worker. Whatever he may have thought of her foreign origin, he was impressed by her character.

4. Do your work habits commend you to your supervisors? How can you improve in this area?

Ruth impressed Boaz with her work habits. We would hope that we reap the same notice, protection, and blessing Ruth did. Diligence on the job typically receives notice and commendation. But even if it does not, we persist in a good work ethic because it is the godly thing to do.

As Paul says, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23)—and he was speaking to slaves! Our diligence awaits its reward from God. If people notice, then so much the better to draw attention to the one for whom we truly work.

5. How did Boaz greet Ruth? What privileges did he give her? (2:8-9)

Boaz now spoke directly to Ruth. "Hearest thou not?" might be translated "Listen carefully." He called on her to pay careful attention to the instructions he was about to give. It is noteworthy that he addressed her as "daughter." He apparently was considerably older than she (cf. 3:10). His first interest in Ruth, therefore, was a fatherly one. The fact that he would treat a foreigner this way indicates the generosity of his character.

Here, then, was a meeting of two extraordinary persons. They differed in many respects: he was elderly, she young; he was a Jew, she a Moabite; he was rich, she poor. Yet they had at least one thing in common—a dedication to the interests of others.

Boaz went on to offer Ruth special privileges in his field, urging her not to glean in any other field. This was an invitation to stay in his field all through the harvest. Her needs would be so well supplied there that she need not seek out another.

He instructed her to stay close to his maidens. These were female workers who assisted in the harvest. The men would cut the grain with sickles, and the women would follow and tie up the sheaves. Ruth was to watch them to see where they were harvesting, then follow to gather whatever they had missed.

Normally the gleaners did not gather until the harvesters had left, but Boaz allowed Ruth to follow them immediately. His later instructions to his workers bear this out. They were to let her glean among the sheaves and even allow some grain to fall purposely for her (Ruth 2:15,16). He did not demean her character by giving her grain, but he made her work as easy as possible.

Boaz also provided for Ruth's safety. Though gleaners should have been treated kindly, this was not always the case. Workers were often rude, vulgar, and undisciplined. It would have been easy for some of the men to ridicule, harm, or defile an unprotected foreign woman. But Boaz ordered the young men not to touch her (v. 9). He also commanded them not to rebuke her for working in the same field.

One more privilege Boaz extended to Ruth was refreshment. When she was thirsty, she was permitted to "go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." Water was drawn from the town well and brought to the fields for the workers. The "vessels" were either jars or skins. Though the water was usually reserved for the workers, the kindly Boaz gave Ruth access to it as well.

Boaz was going far beyond his duty. He overlooked no detail in providing for Ruth's comfort. Far from letting a difference in nationality become a barrier, he accepted Ruth as a worthy person and assisted in her good deeds for Naomi.

6. Why was Ruth overwhelmed by Boaz's kindness? (2:10)

Ruth was genuinely moved by these expressions of kindness. She prostrated herself in humility, overawed by the grace this important man had extended to her. She was especially amazed because she was a foreigner. She had come to the field with anxiety, perhaps expecting the opposite treatment. The kindness of Boaz evoked more gratitude than she could express.

This incident reminds us of the grace God has extended to us, undeserving sinners, in Jesus. How do we respond to it? We ought to receive it thankfully but humbly, astonished that He should take note of us. And having received His grace, we ought to extend it freely to others.

7. What impressed Boaz about Ruth even before he met her? (2:11,12)

Boaz answered the question Ruth had raised. He had extended grace to her because of the person she had proved herself to be. Though he had not previously met her, he knew of her reputation for loyalty. Her story had spread in this small town, and Boaz was deeply impressed.

She had been faithful to her mother-in-law after her husband's death. This had led her to make the greatest sacrifice—forsaking father, mother, and even the land of her birth. And she had done all this without prospect of anything better; rather, she came to live among a people she had never known to face a potentially dismal future. Her migration was like that of Abraham when he came from Ur (Heb. 11:8-10). To Boaz, it was a heroic act.

He therefore prayed that the Lord would richly reward her (Ruth 2:12). Boaz clearly implied that whatever he was now doing was inadequate to repay her for her good deeds to Naomi and the family of Elimelech. Only God could do that fully. Ironically, the Lord eventually used Boaz himself to answer this prayer.

Boaz's blessing was based not only on Ruth's loyalty to Naomi but also on her newfound faith in Israel's God, under whose wings she had taken trustful refuge. Here is a beautiful picture of a helpless bird snuggling up to its mother under her wings.

Ruth had committed herself when she said Naomi's God would be hers as well. She had indeed taken refuge under His wings.

RUTH ACCEPTED AS A WIFE (Ruth 3:9-11)

As Ruth returns to Naomi that evening, she carries about two-thirds of a bushel of grain (Ruth 2:17). That is the equivalent of several days' wages, and it is an amazing amount for gleaning in just one day. Ruth has much to say to Naomi about the kindnesses shown to her by Boaz.

In the intervening verses not in today's text, Naomi assumes the role of matchmaker. She knows that Boaz is more than just a relative of her deceased husband. According to the Mosaic law, Boaz can be a "redeemer." Such relatives assume the responsibilities of redeeming a family's land that has been sold, purchasing the freedom of a relative who has sold himself into servitude, being the avenger for a near relative who is murdered, and/or marrying a childless widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The marriage under the latter concept is known as a *levirate marriage*; that is from the Latin word *levir*, meaning "husband's brother." The barley and wheat harvests are almost complete, and the marriage proposal is about to take place.

8. What were the duties of a kinsman-redeemer in Israel (Ruth 3:9)?

The first day of gleaning in Boaz's field was a turning point in the lives of Naomi and Ruth. When Ruth returned and identified the owner of the field she had worked in, Naomi was elated. This was not only because Boaz had supplied their need but also because he was a "next kinsmen," or redeemer (Ruth 2:20).

The kinsman-redeemer's duties to his next of kin are enumerated in Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 25. As stated above, he was to care for the needy of the family, avenge the blood of a murdered relative, or redeem the relative from slavery if he had become a slave for debts he owed. He was to buy back his relative's land for him if he had become so poor that he had to sell it, and he was to marry his relative's widow if he had died without heirs. This last was to produce a son to preserve the family name.

9. What role did Naomi see Boaz fulfilling as a kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's family?

Ruth carefully follows the instructions of Naomi (Ruth 3:1-4, not in today's text). Naomi decided to try to obtain for Ruth the security of a marriage relationship, or "rest" (3:1; cf. 1:9). She had Boaz in mind as the probable husband. Though he was not obligated to marry her, since he was not the brother of her deceased husband, he was a near relative, and no one nearer had come forward to take this responsibility.

In that regard, Ruth followed her advice and goes to Boaz's threshing floor at night without being detected. She observes where Boaz lies down for the night, and at the proper time she lies down near him. During the night Boaz stirs, detects that someone has invaded his area of privacy.

10. How did Ruth's proposal of marriage to Boaz take place? (3:9)

When Boaz asked who she was, she answered, "I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." The word translated "skirt" is the same as that translated "wings" in 2:12. Ruth had placed herself under the wings (protection) of the Lord. Now she was asking Boaz to extend protection over her by becoming her husband (cf. Ezek. 16:8).

Ruth's answer reflects a boldness that she has already demonstrated in earlier choices to follow Naomi and the God of Israel. Her response has three parts to it: to provide her name, to state that she is subservient to Boaz, and to suggest that Boaz

spread his covering over her to acknowledge the special obligations that exist because of his being a relative of Naomi's deceased husband.

11. How did Boaz respond to Ruth's proposal? (3:10,11)

Boaz has the ability to comprehend the big picture immediately and to think about it clearly. His first words are another spiritual blessing that he pronounces on Ruth. This takes away any improper motives that are sometimes assigned to this event.

The phrase *my daughter* shows that Boaz is fully aware of the generational difference between himself and Ruth. He knows that Ruth's actions are a proposal for marriage. But he understands that her real motivation is to provide care for Naomi, and that this is the best way to do it. He sees that her goal is not just marriage, or she would have chosen a man who is younger.

The reason he was so pleased was that she was showing him even more kindness than she had earlier. The word for "kindness" here denotes a loyal, faithful, steadfast love, which in this case Ruth had shown to her husband's family.

Her first kindness had been seen in her loyalty to Naomi. Her last kindness was in thinking of family responsibilities when considering marriage. Instead of going after the young men of Bethlehem, she had looked to an older man who could fulfill family obligations. He saw her proposal as an unselfish act and was genuinely flattered.

Boaz assured Ruth that she had not acted presumptuously or offended him. He would do all that she had requested. He would not hesitate to marry her, for everyone in Bethlehem knew she was a virtuous woman. Her ancestry did not matter.

The book of Ruth concludes with her marriage to Boaz and the birth of a son to them who is named Obed. The line of Elimelech was thus preserved.

But the story does not end there. Many believe that the reason for this book's being in the Bible is not to have a story of love and marriage, but to present more of the background of David, Israel's greatest king: Obed ends up being David's grandfather. Ruth's acceptance into a community and into a family results in blessings that lead to events that give access for anyone to have acceptance to God through Jesus, the Son of God.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Godly industry does not go unnoticed by God or others (Ruth 2:5-7).
- 2.** For the Christian, power and position should never preclude civility and kindness (vs. 8,9).
- 3.** We should be careful not to treat the grace of God and others as our entitlement (v. 10).
- 4.** Trusting God by doing what is right in the right way never goes unrewarded (vs. 11,12).
- 5.** Do not fear to make legitimate requests of righteous men (3:9).
- 6.** A righteous man will do what he can to respond to the requests of others (vs. 10,11).

CONCLUSION

The opening words of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* are "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." These two phrases are among the most famous in English literature. The sharp contrast between the phrases is also a commentary on the closing chapters of the book of Judges and the four chapters of the book of Ruth.

The last three chapters of the book of Judges depict such things as death, war, and deception. Anyone who reads these chapters is reading about "the worst of times." Then to begin reading the book of Ruth is to find a welcome oasis of family,

devotion, and faith. It is "the best of times" when common people display love, loyalty, marriage, and blessed living.

The people in the town of Bethlehem in Ruth's day did not realize the importance of their village in God's plan. The book of Ruth shows that ordinary people are very important in the eyes of God. While they live out their lives they may never know about the far-reaching consequences of their decisions for God. That is why it is important for each believer to let his or her light shine (Matthew 5:14-16). To reflect the love of God in kind acts may have results far beyond what is ever imagined.

PRAYER

Almighty God, thank You for the blessing of being able to study this lesson and to see that all things really do work together for good to those who love You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Continued faith in the worst of times brings blessings in the best of times.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "Great Loss and New Life" and commemorates the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The lesson shows what Jesus told His disciples about His death and His rising again. Study John 16 and 20.

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