

STUDIES IN RUTH

CHAPTER 4 : "LIVING AT HOME - DESTINY"

REVISION TEST

LAST WEEK'S HOMEWORK

In small groups, discuss questions 1 and 2, namely developing intimacy with Jesus, and meditating on what it means for Jesus to be our redemption. 10 minutes - no feedback.

Then opportunity to share acrostic poems on redemption using REDEEM.

Finally, all together discuss the family tree of Boaz, linking to:

- Judah - his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, see Genesis 46:12
- Rahab - his mother, see Matthew 1:2-6
- Caleb - his great-great-uncle, also known as Chelubai, see I Chronicles 2:9-16, and also verse 18 which shows that Chelubai was also known as Caleb.. BUT note that this is probably not Caleb the spy (Numbers 13:6 - who was the son of Jephunneh, a Kenuzite, although also of the tribe of Judah)
- Moses - via his great-aunt Elisheba who married Aaron (see Exodus 6:23), so Moses was his great-uncle's brother

Note that Boaz had a few things in his family tree that prepared him for his role in the story of Ruth :

- His mother Rahab was an outsider who married into the people of God
- His ancestor Judah had personal experience of the importance of the kinsman-redeemer, through his sons :
 - See Genesis 38. Judah had three sons, his first son Er married Tamar, but was wicked so God killed him. Second son Onan then married Tamar in the role of *goel*, but refused to make her pregnant, so God also killed him. Judah had lost two of his three sons, and was afraid that if Tamar married the third Shelah, he might also die, so he refused to let the marriage go ahead. This eventually led to a situation of incest, where Judah made Tamar pregnant (thinking she was a prostitute), resulting in the birth of twins (Perez and Zerah).
 - It seems likely that Boaz would have known this family history, and been aware of the significance of the role of *goel*, as well as seeing how importantly God viewed it.

RECAP LAST 3 WEEKS

Our previous 3 studies have followed the journey of a remarkable young woman called Ruth who lived in Moab in 1100BC, who was bereaved in a triple tragedy that killed her husband, her brother-in-law and her father-in-law. She left her family and nation to travel with her mother-in-law to a foreign country. Ruth came to Bethlehem, unsure of what she would find, but trusting God for a new beginning. Naomi her mother-in-law became bitter as a result of all that had happened to her, blaming God for the tragedy, and refusing to hope for the future.

But God had other plans for these two women. By a strange "coincidence", when Ruth went gleaning during the barley harvest to try to pick up enough left-over grain to survive on, she *just happened* to come to the field belonging to a man called Boaz, a wealthy farmer who was also a near relative. When they met, he noticed her and included her, making sure that Ruth was protected and provided for.

At the end of the harvest period, Naomi hatched a plan to ask Boaz to take care of Ruth, following the tradition of the redeemer-kinsman, who was required to marry a widow and take care of her on behalf of her dead husband, to raise an heir for his family. We saw Ruth going to meet Boaz at midnight after the harvest party, and asking him to marry her. Boaz accepts, and we have a sense that a special relationship has developed between these two over the preceding 6-8 weeks.

But there is bad news - someone else could stand in their way, as a nearer relative could claim the role of her replacement husband. What will happen next?

CHAPTER 4 - THE STORY

Chapter 4 tells the exciting story of the tense confrontation between Boaz and the other relative.

We see Boaz at the town gate (a place of authority, decision-making).

He intercepts the other relative and asks him to sit down - then asks for ten elders - a quorum for a legal court - they also sit down - judgement.

Boaz tells the man that Naomi has land to sell - does she?? Is he making this up, sounding out the relative to see how he might react? Or maybe she had previously decided to sell the land and already advertised it, and it was public knowledge?? Not clear!

Boaz makes it clear to the relative that he has the responsibilities of *goel* towards Naomi, which includes buying her land. Boaz offers to take this up himself if the man doesn't want to, since he comes next in line.

The other relative at first says he wants to redeem the field that Naomi is selling - oh no!!!

Boaz then tells him that this includes having to marry the foreign woman "Ruth the Moabitess, widow of the dead". The man is worried that this may cause him problems later on, "impairing his inheritance" - possibly he realises that any children born to him and Ruth would be seen as Mahlon's heir, and would inherit the land he would have bought from Naomi - i.e. his money would be wasted as he couldn't pass it on to his own children.

So the other man backs out of the deal, leaving Boaz free to marry Ruth himself.

The deal is witnessed by the elders in the court, as well as the people watching, so is binding. But it is formally sealed by passing over a sandal - meaning not clear, possibly related to Joshua 1:3 "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread on I have given to you" - the sandal may have symbolised placing one's foot on the land as a sign of possession.

Then what happens? A wedding! This follows immediately, since both Boaz and Ruth are free and single, and no courtship is required. In the presence of the elders and villagers there in the city gate, they were married straight away, with great celebration. (see verse 10 - she is now my wife).

Surely this was God's plan for Ruth all along, that she should leave Moab and marry Boaz, becoming part of God's family? But what happened next? A wedding is a start not an end!

Two things happened fairly quickly after the wedding of Ruth and Boaz.

- Firstly she had a baby (verse 13). Nothing unusual about this!
- But secondly, look at the effect on Naomi! Verses 14-17, the women said to Naomi "May God bless you, who has not left you alone without an heir ... this baby shall restore your life and provide for your old age." And Naomi became his nurse, so that the local women called him her son.

I think this story is as much about Naomi as about Ruth. God had not forgotten this older lady who was so hurt and upset that she even blamed him for the hard things that had happened in her life. God wanted to bless even Naomi, and used this special baby to restore her life in the midst of her old age - she was like a young mother again!

And this baby became someone special - verses 18-22 - the baby was Obed, whose son was Jesse, father of the shepherd boy David - and ultimately one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ himself (see Matthew 1:2-6).

[note picture of baby - Susannah Catherine Udall]

Clearly marriage is a central theme of this chapter, and is what the story of Ruth had been leading up to. What is the significance for us?

MARRIAGE MATTERS

We saw in previous weeks that the relationship between Ruth and Boaz is like our relationship with Jesus. At first we are on the edge of his field, trying to pick up enough to survive. But he notices us, includes us, takes care of us, draws us in.

Then something even more wonderful happens - we realise that he doesn't want to treat us like a servant - he loves us, and wants an intimate permanent relationship with us. If we come to him in submission and ask him to accept us, he will never reject us. Marriage is his intention too!

Marriage is wonderful!

[pictures of Richard & Hermine] It's so exciting when two people find each other, with a sense that God has prepared them for each other. They start a new life which is completely different from how they were before their wedding.

Chapter 4 shows us the end of the story, which in fact is not an end at all, but a wonderful beginning.

It is our destiny to be the bride of Christ :

- First an engagement - Hosea 2:19-20 "And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord."
- Then a reminder to be ready for the wedding day - the groom is coming and we need to prepare ourselves - Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids "... Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."
- A note that he wants a perfect bride - Ephesians 5:25-27 "... so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy without blemish."
- It will eventually happen that the bride is fully prepared - Revelation 21:2 - "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"
- Do we want it to happen? Revelation 22:17 - "The Spirit and the bride say "Come"."

But this is a start - wedding is the first day of the rest of our lives - married to be a family, to live together and love each other ...

Jesus wants you and me to be in a close loving relationship of trust and commitment with him, so that we can fulfil our destiny. Ruth was always intended to be married to Boaz and to be an ancestor of King David. You were always meant to be part of the bride of Christ, married to Jesus, and part of his family.

CONCLUSION

We've been on a long journey in these four sessions. We saw a family in exile, wounded by tragedy, and left homeless and hungry. The three women reacted very differently : one turned away from God, one became bitter, and one trusted him for a new future.

Then we saw one woman determined not to starve, going in to the field to get whatever she could, working so hard to find enough to live on. God was with her, and made sure that she ended up in a field belonging to a special farmer - not just a kind man who protected and included her, but a near relative who would eventually become her new husband. And their marriage was very significant in God's plan, leading to the birth of King David, and ultimately to Jesus Christ.

From famine in exile, through gleaning on the edge, through provision of plenty at harvest-time, and finally home to a place of destiny in God's plan.

This was the story of Ruth, but it can also be our story :

- Has life been hard to us, with circumstances that hurt and wound us? Do we feel that we are living in the wrong place, without God's presence, and missing out on his blessing? How will we react? Let life's problems drive you to God.
- If we decide to step out in faith like Ruth, will we be determined to do whatever it takes to find the blessing of God? If we do, we can be sure that Jesus will notice us, and that he will draw us in, including us, protecting us and providing for us.
- But perhaps we aren't satisfied with being on the edge, just seeing the master occasionally? Will we come to the master of the harvest, the owner of the field, and ask him to take care of us, to be our redeemer? Dare we risk approaching him - what if he turns us down? But like Ruth, we'll find that Jesus promises never to reject anyone who comes to him - he too wants a close relationship of love and trust with us.
- If we will commit ourselves to Jesus, loving him, and allowing him to love us and make us part of his bride, we will have an exciting and eternal destiny as part of God's family. Don't be satisfied with anything less than a close loving relationship with Jesus. The best is yet to come!

[THE END !!]

FINAL HOMEWORK

1. Think about it!! [Think or Thwim. Think and Thoap.]
2. Seek God for a clear sense of your destiny, your place in his-story.
3. Remember God's grace, no matter what your previous experience or reactions.
4. Ruth is clearly an important book in the OT, with lots to teach us. But are there any references to it in the NT? If so, where are they? If not, why not?