

THE WOMEN IN MATTHEW ONE

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Ruth

The book of Ruth has often been presented as the story of two desperate, needy women who are rescued by a man—a romantic story, if you please. But there's much more to the story of Ruth.

> **Ruth 1:1 – 13**
> In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.
> Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.
> **6** When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.
> **8** Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9** May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."
> Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."
> **11** But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!"

Why did Elimelech go to Moab? Moab was a neighboring nation, not part of God's Promised Land. Elimelech had good intentions. But he went outside the boundaries of God's plan.

Proverbs 14:12: *There is a way that seems right, but in the end it leads to death.*

When trouble comes, we can do one of three things:

1. **Endure it.** Enduring can make you hard and bitter.
2. **Escape it.** Escaping our troubles causes us to miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. And it almost always leads to bigger troubles.
3. **Enlist it.** If we learn to enlist our trials, they will become our servants instead of our masters and work for us.

Naomi's decision to go back to Bethlehem was right, but what about her motive?

Ruth 1:14 – 18

At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.
"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."
16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. **17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth insists on staying with Naomi. Why would Ruth make this choice?

Ruth 1:19 – 22

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"
20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi?
The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."
22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Notice what word these verses contain - me, me, me, me, me, my, me - 7 times in 2 verses. Naomi is an example of what self-pity can do to any of us.

Ruth 2:1-3

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." **3** So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

When you're at that place where there seems to be nothing you can do, do whatever is in front of you. Ruth volunteers to go glean in the field. She gets moving doing the one thing she can do.

Verse 3 says, *As it turned out*, *she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz*. . . This is what we call the "Providence of God." She found herself in the right place, without any manipulation on her part.

Ruth 2:4 – 16

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!"
"The LORD bless you!" they answered. **5** Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?"
6 The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. **7** She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."
8 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. **9** Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled."
10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"
11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. **12** May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."
13 "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have put me at ease by speaking

kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants."
[14] At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar."
When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. [15] As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. [16] Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her."

We see here God's hand of providence. He led Ruth to Boaz's field and led Boaz to see her.

Boaz is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in his relationship to his bride, the church. Like Ruth, the lost sinner is outside the covenant family of God, with no claim on God's mercy. But God took the initiative and provided a way for us to enter his family through faith in Jesus Christ.

Boaz spoke to Ruth. Here's an incredible truth:

Hebrews 1:1-2: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

God has spoken to you by his Son. God speaks to you and me with grace and love and salvation.

Boaz promised to protect Ruth and provide for her needs.

Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

What a picture of God's grace! Jesus Christ came to this earth as a servant that he might save us and make us a part of his family. We are members of his family and heirs of God.

Ruth has a humble response to Boaz's kindness.

Psalm 10:17: *You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.*

Do you have a testimony of God's providence in your life? A time when "As it turned out" – God was there providing for you and you didn't even realize it?

Ruth 2:17 – 23

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. [18] She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.
[19] Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!"
Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said.
[20] "The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers."
[21] Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'"
[22] Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else's field you might be harmed."
[23] So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Naomi moved from bitterness to blessedness, with new hope that brought a new attitude to her.

Romans 15:4: *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have **hope**.*

Boaz's very name engendered hope in Naomi because of who he was. Jesus gives us that kind of hope. When you consider who he is, what he has done for you, and what he says in his Word, there is no reason to feel hopeless.

What was required to be a kinsman-redeemer?

- Someone who would care about what was lost.
- Someone who would do something about it.
- Someone who was qualified, who could and would pay the price of redemption.

Naomi's family property had been lost through the deaths of Elimelech and his sons, and even if the property could be restored, there were no male heirs to see that the inheritance was held and cared for.

So the kinsman-redeemer would not only provide for the financial reinstatement of a widow's property, but he would also take on the biological responsibility of providing her with an heir to inherit and manage that property. A kinsman-redeemer would pay a high price to do this favor for his relative. It was a great sacrifice.

Jesus is also a kinsman-redeemer for us.

> **Romans 8:17**: *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*
>
> **Hebrews 2:11**: *Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*

He is our nearest relative.

> **Hebrews 2:17**: *For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*
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> **Ruth 3:1-5**
> One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where
> you will be well provided for. **2** Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours.
> Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3** Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed
> in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until
> he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go
> and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."
> **5** "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered.

Naomi presents Ruth with a plan to secure Boaz as the kinsman-redeemer.



The threshing floor was usually a raised platform outside the village and often on a hill where it could catch the evening breeze. It was used by all in the town, taking turns. The men often worked in the evening when the breeze was up, when it could separate the grain from the chaff. Then they would sleep at the threshing floor to protect the harvest.

Naomi instructs Ruth to go down quietly and remain unnoticed until Boaz has eaten and then note where he lies down to sleep.

Why was Ruth willing to do this risky thing? Why was she so willing to obey Naomi?

Ruth 3:6-10
So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.
7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. **8** In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!
9 "Who are you?" he asked.
"I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."
"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

Ruth 3:11-14
And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. **12** Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. **13** Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."
14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor."

In the responses of Boaz to Ruth, we see how the Lord responds to us when we seek to have a deeper fellowship with him:

- He accepts us.
- He assures us. Boaz calms Ruth's fears, and he also makes a promise to her concerning the future.

Ruth 3:15-18
He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.
16 When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?"
Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her **17** and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"
18 Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

In the fourth chapter of Ruth, we see that Boaz skillfully presents the opportunity to the guardian-redeemer who is a nearer relative of Naomi's, who eventually says he could not redeem it because it would endanger his own estate.

Ruth 4:8 – 12
(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

8 So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.
9 Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. **10** I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"
11 Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. **12** Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

When Jesus came to earth, he came at unimaginable expense to himself. He became our kinsman-redeemer. He chose to be our close relative.

Ruth 4:13 – 17

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. **14** The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! **15** He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."
16 Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. **17** The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

The book of Ruth opens with three funerals but closes with a wedding. Chapter 1 is sorrow; chapter 4 is joy. Matthew lists Ruth's name in his genealogy. Why?