

A SECOND LOOK AT RUTH, BOAZ AND THE UN-NAMED NEARER KINSMAN

Two weeks ago we went through the four chapters of the book of Ruth using two excellent readers, Doris Hibbs and Mike Ketcher, with my comments made along the way.

I want to take a second look at Ruth and Boaz, and especially at the Nearer Kinsman who could have redeemed the property of Elimelech, along with the pretty Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, one of the two sons of Elimelech and Naomi who died in Moab. Elimelech's family had sold their family estate in Bethlehem and relocated in Moab because of a famine in the Land of Israel, the "Land of blessing."

Subsequently, they seem to have lost God's blessing indicated by Elimelech and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion dying in Moab. Naomi, is compelled to return to Bethlehem with her two Moabite daughters-in-law lamenting her misery along the way. At the border of Moab one of them, Orpah, turns back because Naomi told the two women that life could be hard for them in Israel. However, Ruth pledges her loyalty to Naomi, and to her God, and begs to go with her. When they arrive in Bethlehem the whole village is stirred because of Naomi's and to hear her tragic story.

It was barley harvest time and Naomi sends Ruth out to glean behind the harvesters to provide food for the two of them. Fortuitously, Ruth ends up working in the field of Boaz, a wealthy man with a good name, who just happens to be a goel, a near kinsman to Elimelech, probably his nephew.

To make a short story even shorter, Ruth and Boaz fall in love. Realizing that Boaz has the legal right, and the wealth, To redeem, or buy back, both Elimelech's surrendered property and to marry his widowed daughter-in-law to raise up a son to be named for Mahlon and to perpetuate the house of Elimelech, Naomi coaches Ruth in the proper way to respond to Boaz' loving-kindnesses to Ruth. The courtship proceeds according to the customs of the Jewish people. Finally, Boaz goes to the city gate to make his bid to buy back, or redeem, Elimelech's property according to the laws surrounding Jubilee, and to redeem Ruth from her, and Naomi along with her, from her poverty and powerlessness--and to marry her even though she is from the despised Moabites.

THERE IS ONLY ONE OBSTACLE!

There is a *nearer* kinsmen, and sad to say, he wants to play the role of the "goel" and purchase Elimelech's property! However, when Boaz informs the Nearer Kinsman that if he buys back the land he must also redeem Ruth and marry her to raise up a son for Mahlon according to the Levirate marriage law. He must do this to preserve the line of Elimelech.

The Nearer Kinsman says, and I quote, "*Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You Boaz, redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.*" The man fears that a marriage with Ruth could ruin his inheritance for his progeny, his descendants! So, Boaz gets a young wife (for he is older), and they have a son named Obed. Obed becomes the father of Jesse, and Jesse becomes the father of David--King David!

The whole town rejoiced with Naomi and for Boaz and Ruth! And Gentile Ruth becomes an ancestor, not only of King David but, through David, an ancestor of the future Messiah of Israel, our Lord and

Savior, Jesus Christ, our very own Kinsman Redeemer, and the genealogies preserved in Matthew chapter 1, and in Luke chapter 3 prove it!

THE SYMBOLISM IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

It was easy to establish two weeks ago that Boaz is symbolic of Jesus. Ruth 2:1 says, "*Now Naomi had a goel, a near kinsman on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing whose name was Boaz.*"

As the story goes on we see the graciousness of Boaz, a good Jew, respected by his employees and the people of Bethlehem. He had the DNA, too, the near kinship that would allow him to raise up a son for Mahlon. He also had the price, being wealthy--and best of all, Boaz had the willingness to redeem. Boaz is perhaps the best example and foreshadowing of Christ as a loving redeemer in all of Scripture.

RUTH REPRESENTS THE PREDOMINANTLY GENTILE CHURCH...

...just as Elimelech and his Jewish family, wandering among the Gentiles and decimated by tragedies, is representative of the Jewish people. **But who does the un-named Nearer Kinsman represent?**

One of the main issues we need to revisit is the symbolism of the Nearer Kinsmen. Who is he, and why in this historical account which makes a point to name names are we not given the name of this man who is so concerned about his name and his legacy?

Why is the including of Ruth in the deal such a *deal-breaker* for the un-named Nearer Kinsman? And if Ruth foreshadows the church, which is grafted into the commonwealth of Israel, and Boaz pre-figures Christ, who does the Nearer Kinsman represent to us? Before I remind us of what I said before, let me quote the esteemed Matthew Henry Commentary—"He... (the nearer kinsman who had priority over Boaz because his DNA was closer to Mahlon's DNA--my addition) he fancied it would mar his inheritance, that it would put a blemish on his family, it would pollute his blood and disgrace his posterity."

Another good commentary, Jamison, Fausset and Brown, adds, "If he had a son by Ruth that son would bear the name of Mahlon." **I believe this un-named Nearer Kinsman, who said, "I cannot redeem" when he heard about Ruth, is a symbol, not of a person but of the Law, the law of Moses, the Law of God, the Commandments of the Lord.** And when we say "the Law" we don't mean just the "Big Ten" Commandments but all the do's and don't's in the Torah, Genesis, Exodus Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Orthodox Jewish community has counted 613 laws in all. Let's look at two of them:

"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." Deuteronomy 25: 5, 6

Boaz and the other *goel* were not brothers and, therefore, these two men had the legal right to marry Ruth if they chose to redeem the estate. They had liberty in the matter. Neither was obligated to do so. Now let's look at Deuteronomy 23:2-8:

“ No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live. Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.”

This passage is interesting. An Ammonite or a Moabite who married into Israel received a penalty. For ten, count them, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 generations their descendants would continue to be regarded as aliens until the 11th generation when the DNA would be almost all Jewish DNA. An inter-married couple in which one was an Edomite (an Arab) or an Egyptian could bear children and reside in Israel, but for 3 generations they and their children would be considered aliens who could not enter the assemblies of worship. The assemblies were divided into, first into men, secondly, women and then, thirdly, the aliens among them.

Why are the Egyptians mentioned? Well, when Moses received this Law from the God Israel was a *mixed multitude* in the Wilderness having been redeemed from slavery in Egypt by the Lord. Either because of inter-marriages or conversions to Jehovah, or both, numerous made the Exodus out of their homeland in Egypt to throw in their lot with the Israelites.

RUTH HAD DONE THE SAME THING

Ruth had left her (still living) parents in Moab and bet her future on Naomi and Naomi’s God. When we covered the book of Ruth two weeks ago, Bob Wilhelm questioned my view, and that of other students of the Word, that the Nearer Kinsman is symbolic of the Law, since the text says is he wanted to protect his inheritance. Bob asked a good and legitimate question. **It was the Law that made marrying Ruth an inheritance problem for the Nearer Kinsman.** First, the letter of the Law permitted a Jewish male to marry a Moabite woman, but the feeling you get when you read the Law is, “Don’t marry a Moabite. It’s not worth it.” If you were to ask the Nearer Kinsman why he backed out of the deal he might well say, “Because of the Law.”

Yes, the letter of the Law permitted it but the spirit of the Law was. “It’s better to not marry a Moabite.”

The Nearer Kinsman is well within the Law in his decision. No one would fault him. When he speaks of his inheritance he means the state of the estate that his descendants would inherit from him. Causing 10 generations to live their lives as third class citizens would not be doing them a service. Beside all that, it’s possible he already had children of his own, either by a wife who is now dead, or by a living wife since that culture allowed for having more than one wife, just as it is still allowed in some Arab cultures today. For good or ill these Arab cultures of our day have preserved many of the manners and customs of the Old Testament. Now, if the Nearer Kinsman married Ruth and she bore a son he would be named, “So and so, the son of Mahlon.” Eventually, that son would end up inheriting the property of Elimelech, which property would follow the blood line. Plus he, and any additional children produced by the mixed marriage, could possibly inherit some of any other properties owned by the Nearer Kinsman. This could compete with the inheritances of his full-blooded Jewish children, if there were any. So, besides some of his children being aliens for generations, there could be “bad blood”

between his Jewish and alien inheritors. The half-Moabite children could conceivably, end up with a larger inheritance than his Jewish children.

The Nearer Kinsman simply did not want to endanger his inheritance for his inheritors, **and it all goes back to marrying a Moabite** and the laws of Israel that bore upon that prospect.

TWICE THE NEARER KINSMAN SAID, "I CANNOT DO IT!"

Besides all that the man may have been prejudiced against Moabites in general. But what the Nearer Kinsman could not bring himself to do because of the Law, Boaz could do, because Boaz was willing to do it--because Boaz had such a strong love for Ruth that he tapped into a higher Law, the "Law of Love"--

"For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." Romans 8:3

Just as Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life for us, Boaz was willing to sacrifice his life, his inheritance or anything he had for Ruth. He was willing to make any sacrifice necessary for this remarkable young Moabitess. He loved Ruth who was already showing the fruit of her faith in the God of Israel! If it meant 10 generations of alien descendants before his progeny could enter in to the assembly, so be it! Ruth was worth it! Worth the risk that the Nearer Kinsman was not willing to take. Besides, Boaz also loved the Lord enough to entrust the Lord with his inheritance and his good name. The Law allowed for a marriage with a Moabite, but such a marriage would also involve a certain amount of grace and sacrifice.

Ironically, Boaz and Ruth and their son Obed become part of the line of, not merely King David, but of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! And Jesus, through Boaz and Ruth--and Obed and Jesse and David, becomes our Kinsman Redeemer in order to, legally, "buy us back," to extricate us aliens and sinners from the condemnation of God's Holy Law. Our redemption was harder than Ruth's redemption because we were more cut off from the Righteous God of Heaven and Earth than Ruth the Moabitess was cut off from Israel. The Law is good, in fact perfect, but the Law is impersonal (in fact, not a person) and it had no smile for Gentile Ruth. The Law of God is just, but the Law is powerless to redeem mankind.

Many nice people in the world who are reverent and religious are still trying to be redeemed (restored to God, saved from Hell for Heaven) by obeying God's laws, or God's laws plus church laws, or God's laws plus church laws plus self-imposed laws.

Something that impressed me and Carolyn as we came to St. Louis from Miami in 1970 was how many good Catholics there are in this town. When we witnessed to Roman Catholics in Miami they would often say things like, "Well, I'm not a good Catholic. You need to have this conversation with a good Catholic." In St. Louis we met those good Catholics!

Apparently, this traditionally Catholic city, divided into parishes and parish cathedrals, has many truly observant, reverent, loyal through thick and thin, good-hearted, kind and honorable Catholics who not only believe in their religion, they practice it! Some one has noted that conservative Catholics and conservative Protestants have more in common with each other than either has with theological liberals in their own movements.

The dispute between Catholics and Protestants has always been, ever since the Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, about “grace versus works” for salvation. Or more specifically, “grace versus grace + works” for salvation. Protestants believed in salvation by grace through faith (Justification by faith”) while Catholics maintained that both faith in Christ AND trusting in one’s own good works is the better formula for gaining entrance into Heaven.

To be completely fair I have to admit that many Catholics do do the good works--volunteering in our many hospitals around St. Louis, helping the poor, sponsoring ball teams for needy kids, and more. Bible based Christians would insist, however, that while we are saved to serve God by serving people, if we are depending on our human merits, our own good works to supplement the finished work of Christ on the Cross we may not be fully depending on Christ to save us.

And this leads us into the main point we want to make about the unnamed Nearer Kinsman. For people who include human good in the mix for obtaining salvation, regardless of their religious affiliation, THE LAW OF GOD, THE COMMANDMENTS, OBEYING GOD AND BEING GOOD IS OFTEN THE “NEARER KINSMAN” WHEN IT COMES TO WHAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY DEPENDING ON TO BE REDEEMED FROM SIN AND SAVED FOR HEAVEN!

People...reader, the Nearer Kinsman of merely human good and trying to do one’s best and relying on your own ability to keep God’s laws, if he (it) could speak to you, would say what the Nearer Kinsman in the story of Ruth said, “**I CANNOT DO IT!**” A high percentage of folks we have talked with in this town pretty much expect to go to Heaven, and will say so. If you ask, “Where are you going when you die?” they will say, “Well, I’m a pretty good person. I don’t see Jesus sending me to Hell. Yeah, I think I’ll go to Heaven.”

Yes, they name the Name of Jesus, but they suspect, hope at least, that they will go to Heaven because they are basically good and decent people. They tend to think, “I believe in God and when I stand before Him I think He’ll let me in because, not to sound conceited, I’m a nice person. I never intentionally hurt anyone. Compared to some people I’ve met I’m pretty darn nice!” In other words, these people feel they are keeping the rules, the laws.

Carolyn and I talked about this last night and she said something insightful (not unusual) about commandment keeping. She noted that in the Garden of Eden there was only one commandment--- *“You are free to eat from any tree of the Garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Genesis 2:7* Adam and Eve, and the human race, would have been saved from sin, shame and judgment if they had simply obeyed that one command. Eventually, they would have gotten around to sampling the “*Tree of Life*” and would have lived forever in fellowship with God.

Eve wouldn’t have suffered the pain of childbirth. Cain wouldn’t have killed Abel. Dressing the garden would never have become laborious. There would have been no diseases. The Earth would not have groaned in travail with earthquakes and tornados. No wars, no hostile animals, no weapons, no bombs would have been devised.

Yes, there was a commandment that, if it had been kept, would have spared, saved and preserved mankind in an un-fallen state--but it is too late for us to be saved that way!

Even now, technically, theoretically, there is a hypothesis in which to erect a plan of salvation based on keeping God’s laws, **only you would have to keep *all* of them!** Galatians 3:21, 22 and 25 asks, “*Is the*

*Law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the Law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that, **what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe--now that faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the Law.**"*

Also, Galatians 3:10 says that if you keep the whole law but break only one law you are condemned as a law-breaker. **Salvation is by grace, not law. It is through faith, not human works. Jesus did the work!**

You know, what we needed was a Near Kinsman who is not part of the human problem--and that is what we have in Christ! He *kept* the Law! Only someone who is not condemned can save those who are condemned. A drowning man is in no position to rescue someone who is drowning himself! A man who rescues people from a sinking ship has to be on a ship that is *not* sinking! Let's say you and I are both on a sinking ship and I throw you a rope from the upper deck to the lower deck and pull you up to the top deck; will that save you? Not for long.

Boaz was a Kinsman and Boaz was a redeemer. He was a Kinsman but he, himself, did not need to be redeemed. He had the legal right to redeem Ruth along with the property surrendered by Elimelech and Mahlon. He was able to redeem; he had the price to "buy back" the property and the people involved, both Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Best of all He was *willing* to redeem! And on top of all that he was a good man, a man of virtue and integrity. **JESUS IS "MIGHTY TO SAVE!"** Because He is impeccable He paid the price for our lost and sinful souls with His own righteous blood! He became one of us, yet without sin. He could legally pay for our sins AND He was not part of our problem. Best of all **HE WAS WILLING!!**

It temporarily bankrupted Him, you know—*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich."*

NOTE: Two invitations were given: #1--To be redeemed by faith alone in Christ alone. #2--To work with Jesus to rescue the perishing, to inform the confused, to open your mouth and to speak the gospel to people.