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Title: Beach Reads Ruth: Redeemed

Date: August 11 & 12, 2018

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Scripture: [Isaiah 11:1-6](#)

Text: [Ruth 3 & 4](#)

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Where there is rain there is grain and where there is grain there is bread, in the house of bread. That's where we ended last week although I offered a footnote. There will be more than bread baking in the house of bread.

Today, we finish a wonderful story found in the book of Ruth. It makes a great Bible beach read. For almost a decade, every summer we've looked at stories in scripture that remind us of the blockbusters novels read on vacation. This one is a romance, a genuine love story. If made into a movie, it would be a chick flick. But the movie might not have a PG rating because today, a part of the story is for mature audiences. After hearing it, you may say, "Wait a minute. I don't remember studying that in Sunday school" and you'd be right. It isn't found in our kid's curriculum.

If you are new today, let me tell you what you've missed. Our story from the 12th century BC starts during a drought in Bethlehem. A farmer named Elimelech takes his wife Naomi and their two sons to Moab in search of food. Sadly, things don't go well. First, his sons marry outside of the faith. Then he dies. Then, his sons die. In a foreign land, his wife Naomi is left with her two foreign daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Widows, without male relatives to take care of them, were the lowest of the low in that primitive society. The women are destitute.

Naomi tries to send her daughters-in-law back to their native families. Orpah goes, but Ruth pledges her allegiance, not just to Naomi but also to God. She does so because of the love she experienced in Naomi, something the Hebrews called "hesed" that she sees in Naomi. Her promise is one of the most famous in scripture. "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16b)

The two women return to Bethlehem just as the barley harvest is beginning. Everybody greets Naomi, excited that she is back, but she says, "Don't call me Naomi. My life is the pits. From now on, call me bitter. God's hand has

turned against me." Ruth, however, gets the attention of everyone because she is so loving. She now radiates what is called "*hesed*," a special kind of love that endures forever. What she saw in the Naomi, now she shows to others.

As impoverished widows, the only way to take care of themselves is to glean. Gleaning was the welfare system set up by God whereby aliens, orphans, and widows could pick up the leftovers dropped by harvesters. So after they arrive in Bethlehem, Ruth sets out to glean for food. Out of all of the possible fields that she could have chosen, "as it happened", she chose a field owned by a faithful, older man named Boaz. And, "as it happened" Boaz is related to Elimelech, Ruth's deceased "father-in-law." Boaz sees Ruth, offers her lunch and tells his reapers to leave extra sheaves of grain behind so she gleans lots of leftovers. She takes so much grain home that Naomi says, "Where did you get all this grain?" "Well, I just happened upon a field owned by a nice man named Boaz which had lots of leftovers. We even had a lunch date and he said that I could glean all of his fields." "Boaz?" Naomi shouts. That didn't just happen. Boaz is one of our closest relatives. Maybe God hasn't turned against us. God led you to a "kinsman-redeemer." He will redeem and rescue us. Naomi probably had to explain that concept of "kinsman-redeemer" to Ruth just as I need to explain it to you.

In our culture, when a property is sold, a title passes from the seller to the buyer. If I sell you my house it is your forever; or until you want to sell to somebody else. Not in ancient Israel. When God's people took the Promised Land, it was carved up and distributed to tribes, then to clans and finally to families. The piece of property a family got belonged to that family. But sometimes, hard times hit so a family could sell the property to pay a debt. But the transaction was temporary, something more like a land lease because at the end of fifty years, a Jubilee year was declared and all property reverted to the original family.

But there was a provision where the property could be redeemed earlier than 50 years out, by a family member or a kinsman. The kinsman-redeemer had the responsibility to protect the property of the larger family. This is called The Law of Redemption.

Connected to this law is the responsibility to continue a family in event of the death of a husband. If the widow had no son, she could request that the next of kin, a brother, an uncle, a cousin, a kinsman, take her in and continue the bloodline. Again, the kinsman is responsible for protecting persons in the family but at the same time, protecting the genealogy, making sure that the family tree stays intact. This is the Law of the Levirate

Marriage. Both laws, The Law of Redemption and Levirate Marriage are carefully spelled out in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.¹

So Naomi, though bitter toward God, suddenly realizes that God's hand is all over their return and the discovery that there was a kinsman who could redeem their property and take on the responsibilities of marriage with Ruth. She explained this to Ruth just as I explained it to you and says, "Boaz will redeem our property and rescue you from widowhood. Stay close to Boaz."

She does. Or at least she tries to. She goes to his fields, harvesting the barley and then the wheat. She gleanes for six or seven weeks but nothing happens. No more flirtatious encounters; no more picnic lunches. And now, the harvest is over and Ruth isn't going to see Boaz every day in the fields. That's a problem and that's our review. If you haven't been here, you are caught up in 7 minutes, less than a fourth of the time it took the two previous weeks. Now to the new stuff and the pace picks up significantly. Rather than taking years to unfold, it happens in less than 24 hours, just a night and a morning.

The setting is the feast of Shavuot, a big harvest party that God told Israel in Exodus to have at the end of every harvest, seven days where everyone, foreigners, orphans, and widows included were to eat and drink themselves silly. Think Thanksgiving only a week long. Naomi, who has gone from being bitter and down on God, thinking God might be leading them to a future, believes this is the perfect time to encourage Boaz to man-up and be the kinsman-redeemer. She tells Ruth to shower up, put on her most fetching dress, do up her hair in that cute Moabite kind of way, splash on her most alluring perfume, and go to Boaz. On the one hand, Naomi has a point. Ruth didn't look the best or smell the best on their first date. She may have been the most beautiful woman in the world but nobody looks beautiful when they are a sweat-hog gathering barley. Naomi says "You need to create that magic moment and the feast is the perfect time for it. He's happy. It's been a great harvest, with lots of rain and lots of grain and lots of bread and wine too. Sneak down to the party and after Boaz has finished the feast, watch him. When the tryptophan from the turkey and dressing kicks in when he has that carb crash from consuming all of the grain and wine, '...observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.'" (Ruth 3:4). What?

You heard that right. I told you that the Bible beach reads are just like the books you read on vacation. And I know what's in some of those books. Lie down beside him, pull back his blanket, and whatever he tells you to do, do it. Wow. Now you can see why this isn't taught in youth group. But let's not cover up the cover-up.

Ruth does just that. She sets out to seduce Boaz. She cleans up, goes to the festival, watches Boaz eat and drink until he is in a "contented mood." He finds a spot, lies down and goes to sleep. Ruth approaches quietly, uncovers his feet among other things and lies down beside him. If this were a chick-flick and we were trying to keep a PG rating, the movie would fade to black to leave it to your imagination. But if we did that, we'd miss the good stuff and you don't want to skip over the good stuff, not even here in church.

"At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet was a woman! He said, 'Who are you?'" (Ruth 3:8-9a) Remember, there's no electricity. He didn't leave the bathroom light on so when he got up in the middle of the night, he wouldn't stub his toe. It's in a granary that's pitch dark. So he says, "What's going on? Who is sleeping next to me?" "Who are you?" he asked. "It's Ruth," she said. Will you spread your cloak over me? The reference to a man spreading his cloak over a woman is a reference to the marriage ceremony. She is asking symbolically for him to bring her both into his bed and under the protection of his wings. She proposes to Boaz that he propose to her. "...spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin, one with the right to redeem." (Ruth 3:9) And Boaz said yes. He accepted her proposal to propose.

"I will. I'm amazed you aren't looking for the younger men." Maybe, just maybe we've discovered why Boaz didn't send chocolates or text Ruth for another date. He thought he was too old. But there is another reason. "It is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I." (Ruth 3: 12b) "What? There's another man?" No wonder Boaz has been so slow in pursuing Ruth. There is another kinsman who has first rights. Now, this? Boaz says, "There is another. He has the first claim. He might want to marry you, redeem you." You are reading along and you say, "no." We hoped that they would marry and live happily ever after. Don't you just hate it when the author baits and switch? Ruth must have been heartbroken.

So Boaz says, "I'll cover you with my cloak, promise my life to you in marriage if I can. But this has to be done the right way. This is what we are going to do. Stay here until early in the morning. Just before dawn, sneak out while you still have the cover of darkness. We don't want anyone seeing you here. We don't need you getting a bad reputation. Then, I promise, I'll present your case before the elders tomorrow at the city gates and before your the nearer kin."

Before dawn, Ruth slips home and tells Naomi and she says, we just have to wait. But they don't wait long. As the sun rises, Boaz makes good on his promise. He heads to the city gate. The gate of a city in ancient Israel was a combination of city council and courtroom, a place where elders gathered and legal matters were mediated. By the time Boaz arrives, there are already ten leaders present. He sits down and "as it happened" the near kinsman-redeemer walks by and Boaz, jumps up, says, "Come over here, friend. Sit down. I need to talk to you about something."

He sits down and Boaz plays "let's make a deal." He is not only doing it the right way, God's way, we are going to see that Boaz is going to bargain in an incredibly shrewd way. He shows the nearer-kinsman door number one. You know Elimelech's widow is back and he had property. The law of redemption is in effect on that property. I want to know about your intentions. "If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you." So he said, "I will redeem it." (Ruth 4:4b) Again, you are reading along and say, "no." You want Boaz and Ruth together. But hold on. Like I said, Boaz is really shrewd bargainer because in making the deal, he's also going to show him door number two and three.

The guy says, "I'll take the land." Boaz says, "Very well. But let me remind you. When you buy back that land, you also get another mother-in-law. By the way, she goes by the name bitter old woman. Comes with the deal. There's an extra bonus. It comes with a foreign wife, Ruth the Moabite, you know the cute one everyone has been talking about. You know the reputation those Moabite women have. But she's yours as a second wife because of the Levirate law. You must sleep with her which of course, isn't going to be any problem with her. You've got to have kids and split up your inheritance with them. I'm sure your current wife and kids won't mind. Door number one: land. Door number two: bitter mother-in-law. Door number three: foreign wife with a reputation who wants to make babies.

The guy says, "Whoa. Hold on. No, no! I just wanted the land. One mother-in-law is enough and my wife doesn't want me sleeping with another woman, particularly a Moabite. And we've already got enough kids as it is. Count me out. It's all yours. "I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it." (Ruth 4:6) And he hands him his sandal. You had to be there. That's what they did back in the day to seal a deal. Here. Take my Birkenstock so you know I mean it.

Boaz looks around at the crowd and announces. "You heard it. The land, the mother-in-law and the Moabite are now mine. I've got his flip-flop to prove

it. All that which belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. Call me Boaz, "kinsman-redeemer." I've redeemed the land, rescued Naomi, and now take Ruth as my wife, in order that the name of the dead can continue on. You are all witnesses."

And we are. It's an incredible story when we see God active in the lives of a farmer and two widows, even if they don't always know it and didn't know where things were going. In the end, we see that "as it happened" God was leading all along and "as it happened" this story started unfolding years before when God gave Israel the law of redemption to Israel and set up the Levirate marriage to ensure and genealogy. It's not just a romance. It a love story. First, Naomi's loving kindness, her witness of "*hesed*" that brought her Moabite woman to God. Then Ruth loving demonstrating that same love, to Naomi, God and eventually Boaz. And finally, Boaz, loving God so much that he does things the right way, God's way, in order to love Ruth as her kinsman-redeemer.

There is an epilogue. On the honeymoon night, there was more than bread baking in the house of bread. I told you. Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet, they conceive and nine months later we have a famous picture of a young woman and her older, faithful husband giving birth in Bethlehem. When the child is born, he's a star. The women take him from Ruth, hand him to Naomi and bless him. They name him Obed which means servant of God. He would be a servant of God because faithfulness and trust is God's way. Sure enough, this blessed little boy grows up to have his own little boy, Jesse. And Jesse has a little boy himself who will be the greatest king ever to lead Israel. His name is David.

The credits roll and you think, never in a million years did I see that coming and it will take a million years for it to ever happen again. But it doesn't take a million years. Just a little less than 1,200 years another child will be born within this kinsman-redeemer tradition. This one too has an older man who does the right thing in the right way with a young woman. Their names aren't Boaz and Ruth, they are Joseph and Mary and in the house of bread, in Bethlehem, our kinsman-redeemer is born. His name is Jesus.

¹ Davies, E. W. (1983). Ruth 4:5 and the duties of the *gō'ēl*. *Vetus Testamentum*, 33(2), 231-234.