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Ruth's Redemption and Ours

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Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)

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We have been taking a look at the Gospel according to Ruth. We use the term "Gospel", because the book of Ruth is one of dozens of miniature picture books in the Old Testament which graphically portrays man's need and God's provision of salvation. It is done through the lives and experiences of people. You may remember studying the Gospel according to Cain and Abel, the Gospel according to Abraham and Isaac, the Gospel according to Noah, the Gospel according to Joseph, to Joshua, to Gideon and to Samson to name but a few. We see in these stories that the portrait of God's great plan of redemption was not an afterthought. It wasn't a last minute attempt to rescue man from a seemingly hopeless situation. God's precious plan to return man to oneness with Himself was framed in His heart long before the foundation of the earth. He determined to prepare the heart of man for the miracle of Calvary in His word through illustration after illustration, each of which was left emblazoned on the tablets of history in the unmistakable form of a cross.

The Gospel according to Ruth surfaces from the pages of Scripture as perhaps one of God's most beautiful portraits of all. It is a love story. But then is it not a divine portrayal of the greatest love story ever written? It is a story with a happy ending to be sure, but is it not a foretaste of that happy ending that awaits all of God's redeemed when this age of warfare and weariness is swallowed up in victory and celebrated by a wedding feast so wonderful that our finite minds cannot really contain it? The story of Ruth is, in essence, the story of the redemption of man. It is *His* story, but then all of history is *His story*. Ruth's story is *His* story in a very special way. So our lesson is entitled, "The Gospel According to Ruth: Ruth's Redemption and Ours".

We looked in our last lesson at Ruth's response. We concluded that it was a perfect reminder of the lost art of loyalty. After her mother-in-law's bitter encounter with the circumstances of life, including the loss of her two sons, one of which was Ruth's husband, we saw Ruth choosing to place herself in Naomi's hands without reservation. You may recall those beautiful words she uttered, "Whither thou goest, I will go, wherever thou lodgest, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, your God

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shall be my God, (for now I belong to Him).” So Ruth’s attitude was characterized by loyalty. Her loyalty led her to make a commitment. Her commitment ought to logically follow through and make her a woman of faithfulness. We will see this as the lesson unfolds for us.

There are two things I want to ask you to look for in this story. I want you to look for the sovereignty of God and the faithfulness of God. Ruth committed herself unreservedly to the God of Israel. The key is, the God of Israel had already committed Himself unreservedly to Ruth. So no incident was an accident to Ruth. Every event was divinely involved in the accomplishing of His final objective for her life. No incident is an accident in your life either.

As our story takes up, Ruth and Naomi are settled in Bethlehem. They are preparing to live out their lives in what appears to be, circumstantially, a lonely and uneventful existence. But remember that neither loneliness nor uneventful existences are normally characteristic of the people of God. So let’s begin reading in Ruth 2:1

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

(Ruth 2:1-3)

So the curtain of God’s sovereignty is pulled back just a trace and we see in the background a new character emerge. The new character is a man named Boaz. Now the name Boaz means “in him there is strength”. The Scripture tells us that he was a relative of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband. We also find that he was a man of great wealth. At least one commentator says that phrase literally means he was a man of great knowledge of the law. The New International Version says that he was a man of standing. In all likelihood he was all three: a man of physical wealth, of spiritual insight and of impeccable reputation in Israel. Boaz was somebody special. He was to be somebody special to Ruth. Verse 2 says that Ruth was not content to live at home and wonder,

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“What can Naomi do to take care of me?” Her concern was what she could do to take care of Naomi. Being a foreigner, she had no status in Israel. She humbled herself and elected to subject herself to menial tasks in order to earn a living. She was trusting her newfound God to move someone's heart and give her a job.

Have you ever needed a job and responded that way? Have you ever had to lay yourself at the feet of God and say, “Lord, I am going to go look and I am willing to work, but Lord, You are going to have to make it happen.” That is the position that Ruth was in. Verse 3 is pivotal in Ruth's story, as it says that it just so happened that she started to glean in the field that belonged to Boaz. He just so happened to be a relative of her departed husband. It just so happened.

Aren't the coincidences of life amazing? You see my friend, one great difference in living life as a Christian and as an unbeliever is this: to the believer, every experience in life has meaning. This is because every experience in life is part of the grand design of a sovereign God, and is either planned or allowed to ultimately bring spiritual blessing into your life. Look back over your life and underscore those unimportant, seemingly unplanned experiences of yours, even those inconvenient, unwanted experiences. As you do this, you will see how a God of detail arranged and planned and used that phone call or that “chance” meeting or those unusual circumstances, even that seemingly unnecessary tragedy for your good and His glory. There are no coincidences in the Christian life.

Boaz just didn't “happen” to have a field of reapers. Ruth didn't just “happen” to decide to look for work in the fields. Ruth didn't just “happen” to end up in a field owned by her mother-in-law's relative. God just “happened” to arrange it. As always, His timing is perfect. Let's continue with verse 4,

And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.

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

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:

And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath

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continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

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:

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.
(Ruth 2:4-9)

It just so happens, coincidentally, of course, that Boaz returns from Bethlehem on the very day that Ruth is laboring in the fields and he has an employee leadership meeting planned for that afternoon. He greets the men in the name of the Lord and they returned his greeting with a unified spiritual blessing. This was the customary exchange of greetings in Israel between employer and employee in that day when a godly relationship existed. The master would say, "The Lord be with you." The servants would answer with one voice, "The Lord bless you." Each was invoking God's best on the other, and each was committing their part of the labor contract to God. What a beautiful symbol of what a Christian work environment ought to be like.

Having exchanged blessings, our successful executive "just happens" to notice a stranger, a foreign woman, who is gleaning in the fields. Every employee was an individual to Boaz. He, no doubt, knew every one of them. He knew them so well, in fact, that he noticed the new girl on the job immediately. So he first asked his supervisor of reapers, "Who is this young lady?" in verse 5. His supervisor answers, "She is the Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from Moab. She has asked to be able to glean some of what the reapers have missed. Boy, is she a worker. She stayed in the field all day except for a few minutes' break." There you see a sign of her faithfulness.

Then comes verse 8, and Boaz and Ruth meet for the first time face to face. Boaz approaches this impoverished foreigner with great respect and tenderness. "Did you get the word?" he asked, "You don't need to look for another field in which to glean tomorrow. You stay right here by my ladies and do what they do. Furthermore, the word is out that none of the men is to lay a hand on you. No one will harass you. If you get thirsty, you just drink of the water they have drawn." You see, Ruth signed on as

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a Kelly Girl and got hired the first day. When you are yielded to the Word of God and the will of God and are willing to humble yourself in order to work, God will be your employment agent. He was for Ruth. She not only got a full-time job, she got extra benefits besides. To start out with, she got a “no harassment” clause. She got a free water cooler pass. “Exceedingly abundant above all that ye ask or think.” Such is the kind of contract our heavenly employment service writes.

Now the secret to continued growth through circumstances is often this: how do we respond to the unexpected blessings and promotions of life? Do we become presumptuous that at last we have been noticed and then demand some more? Or do we fall on our faces before God in gratitude. Let's take a look at Ruth to see what she did,

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?

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.

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 2:10-12)

So Ruth, the faithful one, was also Ruth, the humble one. How often the two go together. She falls on her face before Boaz in amazement that he would take special note of her, and asks why. Boaz answers that he had been told what kind of person she was. There is your criteria for hiring people if you are in personnel. “Because I found out what kind of quality of person you are,” Boaz replied. “You left your family and your people to come to a land and a people that were foreign to you just to bless your mother-in-law. That kind of faithfulness must be rewarded. And your reward will be at the hand of the Lord your God under whose wings you have come to trust.” My friend, God honors a faithful spirit. He honors loyalty. He honors those who keep their commitment. He honored Ruth.

The rest of chapter 2 develops the story further, but let me condense it for the sake of time. Boaz goes a step further in

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verse 14 and offers Ruth a free cafeteria pass to go with her pass to the water cooler. In verse 15, he called his not-so-grim reapers together and admonished them to leave Ruth alone and not rebuke her, even though she was a foreigner. In verse 16 he adds, "By the way boys, let a little extra fall by the way in front of her and let her pick it up." So Ruth gets home that night and she is carrying this big bushel basket full of wheat, and what a story she had to tell her mother-in-law. Naomi stops and praises God because He hasn't forgotten her after all. She explains to Ruth, "You don't realize the half of it; not only is Boaz extra special to Israel, he is really extra special to us, because he is one of our closest relatives." So verse 23 concludes that Ruth continues to work in Boaz' fields and continues to live with her mother-in-law. So much for her responsibility. Let's look at her reception as we turn to chapter 3,

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?

And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor.

Wash thy self therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.

And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.

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.

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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.

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. (Ruth 3:1-11)

God had a unique plan for caring for widows in Israel. It was called "kinsman redemption". The plan was if a woman was widowed, the next of kin had the first opportunity to buy her property; but the responsibility was also his, if necessary, to marry her. When a Hebrew was forced to sell his inheritance because of poverty, the nearest relative was to redeem it for him. But in case one acted as a kinsman redeemer for someone who died without a son, he was also obliged to marry the widow. Should he refuse, the next closest kin or relative was given the opportunity to be her kinsman redeemer.

Now Naomi's plan was for Ruth to go and lay herself at the feet of Boaz and ask him to spread his robe over her. The reason was that this was the Hebrew way of entering into a marriage agreement. Boaz seemed to be a bashful bachelor. He was probably middle-aged. He had taken no steps to act as Ruth's redeemer. It was totally in the bounds of good taste for her to lay herself at his feet in humility and ask to be redeemed. By asking him to cover her with his robe she was saying, "Take me to be your wife. Fulfill your lawful duty to me and be my kinsman redeemer." By doing so, Boaz would be saying, "I take you under my protective wing and want to enter into marriage with you." She knew him to be an honorable man. He knew her to be a virtuous woman. The whole touching scene was in the confines of the plan of God and, of course, in good taste.

It is a beautiful story, but there is one hitch. It adds an element of suspense and forces Ruth to trust the sovereignty of God even more. The problem surfaces in verse 12. Boaz is speaking:

And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. (Ruth 3:12)

Boaz says, "I'm a close relative, but according to the law, there is one who is a nearer kinsman than I am." Boaz was, no doubt, touched and moved to take Ruth as his wife. He was, no doubt, older than she and most impressed that she had chosen

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him over the younger men. Until her next of kin had been given an opportunity to redeem her, however, Boaz was not free to do so.

Now a good fiction writer of love stories could turn the next 24 hours into an eternity. But the Holy Spirit didn't need to do that. The facts themselves are interesting enough.

1- Boaz had to locate the one who was next of kin and offer him the right to be kinsman redeemer. So verse 1 of chapter 4 tells us that he went to the city gates and sat down until his potential competition for Ruth's hand happened to come along. Come along he did.

2- Boaz asked him to sit down for a spell because he had a biggie to discuss. We see this in verse 1. Then Boaz found ten elders of the city to ask them to sit down as witnesses, so they sat down. Now here comes the confrontation. You could just hear the music in the background. Will he buy Ruth and leave Boaz to go and tell his true love she now belongs to another? Or will Boaz come rushing into her arms and say, "Now you are mine at last!"?

And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's:

And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

(Ruth 4:3,4)

"Jeepers! that is not in the plan," thought Boaz. Isn't it neat how God always puts in a little suspense so that He can reveal Himself even further? It is at this time that either NBC or CBS would pause for a commercial or two or three or four. But God doesn't leave us in suspense very long.

Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

(Ruth 4:5,6)

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Now the music would certainly swell here. Ruth's next of kin was willing to redeem the land, but he, no doubt, had a wife, so taking Ruth was not a possibility for him. So Boaz is now Ruth's next of kin. He is in line to redeem her. Following the custom of his land, Boaz removed his shoe, and beginning with verse 9 we read this,

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:

And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

(Ruth 4:9-17)

So Boaz, the mighty man in Israel, mighty in authority, mighty in spirit, blameless in reputation, purchases insignificant Ruth, a foreigner with seemingly no credentials. She was one

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who, apart from him, had no stature, no recognition and no worth. But she came to him and humbled herself and asked him to be her redeemer. Boaz confronts the one who has prior claim, but he refuses to pay the price, so Boaz becomes Ruth's kinsman redeemer. Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of David. Through her offspring, the Messiah was to be born.

Truly this is a beautiful love story. Truly this is a story with a happy ending. But obviously we have come full circle haven't we? As we said in the opening of this lesson, the power is in the portrait. Ruth's story gives God glory because it draws with masterful strokes of unrivaled beauty, the perfect plan of a perfect God who sent His only Son to be our kinsman redeemer. He, too, saw us in spiritual poverty. As a result of death, we, too, were separated from the source of our inheritance. We were lonely. There was no future in sight for us. He looked at the crowds of people all around and, through His lens of perfect love, His eye fell upon each of us, one at a time. He noticed us. He came to us. He spoke to us. He called us by name: Jim, Richard, Susie, Martha, Jane. He gave us a chance to labor in His vineyard, to drink of His water. He offered to protect us from harm and to see that all of our needs were supplied, even beyond our wildest dreams. He only asked one thing, that we come and lay ourselves at His feet and ask Him to redeem us. He did all the rest. He would find the one who claimed to be our next of kin; his name was Satan. Satan offered to take from us all that we had and would redeem our possessions. But would Satan redeem us? Not on your life. He was powerless to do so. Thus, Jesus, our kinsman redeemer purchased us and paid the whole price before many witnesses. He sealed the purchase. He planned the wedding and invited the guests.

We have been redeemed! No more loneliness. No more purposelessness. No more hopelessness. We have been redeemed. But to say "we" collectively does not mean that there are not some reading this who have yet to call upon their kinsman redeemer to deliver them. You may be a church member. You may be a church deacon. You may have listened so long and been with Christians so long that you have literally forgotten that you never really came to God on God's terms. Your life might look something like this:

Death, spiritual death, separated you from the love you needed and the inheritance seemed useless and unobtainable.

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But God noticed you in your poverty and came to you and called you by name. He showed you kindness. He offered to protect you and let you drink at His fountain and never thirst again. He wants to be your kinsman redeemer. The Holy Spirit, your Naomi, has given you clear instructions. He said, "Just go lay down at His feet and ask Him to cover you with His robes of righteousness. He will do all the rest." The price has been paid and you belong to Him if you will but lay yourself at His feet and ask.

This brings you to a place called Calvary. You may return 100 times or you may never be here again. We don't seek to alarm you or pressure you; we seek to love you and show you that your kinsman redeemer is waiting. He is waiting to receive you and to cover you with His love. His promise is this: He will be the restorer of your life and a nourisher in your old age. He will restore you and nourish you. Faithful is He who hath called you; He will also do it.

Many of you are interested in this material because you are interested in spiritual growth. But beloved, you cannot grow unless you have been born. You are so important to God that the Great Shepherd stopped when He saw one sheep still not in the fold. He left the 99 and went to seek after the one or the two or the ten still caught in the thicket, not yet free to follow the Shepherd. I don't know who might be reading this who fits that description, but God does and that is all that matters. You may have postponed responding to Christ 1,000 times, I don't know. I only know that in every life there are moments of truth. Everyone has at least one, when he or she comes face to face at the time of decision and, by not deciding, says, "No," to Jesus Christ. If this is your moment of truth, if you have never come to grips with your Redeemer, in the name of Jesus Christ, I beg you to say, "Yes," to Him this moment. Just pray like this:

Lord, Jesus,

I am a sinner, and I am lost. I need a Savior. I need a Redeemer. I know that you have purchased me. I know that You want me and I want to belong to you. By faith I acknowledge my sins and invite you to come into my heart right now.

Amen.

Do you know where Jesus is right now if you prayed that

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prayer and asked Him into your life? If you did that, He is there right now. He will remain there for all eternity. Your moment of truth will have become a moment of victory. Because it is true that...

MOMENT OF TRUTH

In each man's life there comes a time,
In sunset, or in youth,
When face to face his spirit comes
To that soul-searching "Moment of Truth."

To some, it may come in a time of great joy,
To some, in an hour of strife;
To many, it comes upon hearing the Word
Or seeing it vibrant in life.

As the hands of conviction descend upon man,
Though thrilling the life may have been,
The fire of Calvary pierces the past
In a "Moment of Truth" they see sin!

The echo of footsteps...the cry in the dark;
Those events man cannot understand,
Seem to point to a time when the soul is exposed
And the "Moment of Truth" is at hand!

Deceptively, something says, "Someday I will,"
And the light more revealing now glows,
As satanic impressions keep flooding the mind:
"Will this 'Moment of Truth' never close?"

Then, to many, praise God, that "Moment of Truth"
As billows of fire fill the soul,
Means surrender to God...and union with Christ,
And the blood of the Lamb makes them whole.

The fire subsides; the heart finds new joy,
And an indwelling peace comes to pass.
In a "Moment of Truth", the soul found its rest
And forgiveness for sins of the past.

Yet to others, this self-same "Moment of Truth"
Finds its chance to redeem denied,
And ears waxed closed, reveal a heart
With an unwanted Savior outside.

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Will another time come? We pray that it shall;
Yet the soul finds no promise within
That the still, small voice in that "Moment of Truth"
Will ever return again.

To someone, that "Moment of Truth" we laud
Is beckoning even this hour;
And faintly, within that sin-scarred Heart,
There's a rumbling of God's mighty power.

In the name of our Christ, who on Calvary's Hill
Bore all of YOUR sins on that tree,
I beseech you to hearken this "Moment of Truth"
And forever in Him to be free.

Ceasing never to sing...Hosannas to God
For as long as His grace shall allow,
May the Spirit proclaim, in His marvelous name,
That the "Moment of Truth"...is now!

For Focus and Application

1- Have you ever prayed for something and seen God bring the right person or the right opportunity *at exactly the right time to bring Him all the glory*? Do you remember that, when you are tempted to embark on a new venture without praying first? There were no coincidences in the life of Boaz and Ruth, and there are none in your life either. Praise God for His concern over the details of your life.

2- How would you describe Ruth's attitude when Boaz gave recognition to her in Ruth 2:10? How does this differ from the presumptuous response of many Christians when God *does provide a miracle*?

3- How does Boaz' treatment of Ruth confirm God's provisions for taking care of us? She didn't have to lobby for job benefits. God became her representative and saw that she had "exceeding abundantly above all that she could ask or think". What attitude of Ruth's made that so special? Have you ever stopped to thank God for the job you have? For the benefits you have? Or are you always comparing your lot with someone who seems to have it better? Ask God to forgive you and begin to praise Him for *every benefit you have*.

A Love Story

4- Why do you think God allowed there to be a “nearer kinsman” than Boaz? Why does He often allow something to come up that appears to be a roadblock, only to remove it at the last minute? Can you think of other Biblical illustrations of that principle?

5- How does Boaz’ redemption of Ruth mirror God’s redemption of us? Think about:

- a- Boaz: mighty in power, mighty in authority, blameless in spirit.
- b- Ruth: insignificant, foreigner, no credentials, seemingly no worth.
- c- She came to him in humility and asked him to be her redeemer.
- d- The one who had prior claim could not redeem her.
- e- Boaz paid the price for her redemption.
- f- Once the price was paid, the wedding was planned.

6- Thank God this week for the beautiful illustrations He gives us in the Old Testament of Calvary and God’s love. Praise Him that He is willing to be our “kinsman redeemer”.

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