

RUTH AND BOAZ AND WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW
RUTH 3:6-18

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Helena Demuth (PROJECTOR ON--- HELENA DEMUTH) was born into a peasant family in Germany in 1820. She was a Gentile who, in her later teens, found work as a maid. In 1845 she found a job with a family in Brussels, Belgium. She would later follow that family when it moved to England.

The patriarch of this family was a Jewish man named Karl. He was somewhat older than Helena. He had a wife and eventually several children. Karl was well off financially. He had a significant inheritance which provided him with annual income amounting to about three times that of the average skilled worker. He also had income from his occasional work as a journalist. He had considerable influence upon his society. As a result of his status in society, Karl was a potential source of security for his servant girl Helena. Perhaps by now you are recognizing the parallels with our Bible story involving Boaz and Ruth.

There are, however, significant differences. A friend of Karl described him in this way: “[Karl] does not believe in God, but he believes much in himself and makes everyone serve himself. His heart is not full of love but of bitterness, and he has little sympathy for the human race.” (Robert Payne, *Marx*, p. 50) This is a rather remarkable description coming from one who regarded himself as a friend of Karl.

Karl smoked and drank heavily. He seldom bathed. He spent more than he earned. He was not a very good father. One of his daughters died of an opium overdose. Another committed suicide. While his wife was abroad, Helena got pregnant. Most scholars believe that Karl was the father. But he persuaded a bachelor friend to claim to be the father. When son Frederick was born to Helena, he was immediately adopted out to a poor, working class family. As far as we know, Karl only met Frederick once after that.

Helena received room and board for her work in the family. But she was never paid anything beyond that. Karl wrote much about working class people, but Helena seems to have been the only member of that class whom he ever knew personally. He championed their cause in his writings. But he didn't treat Helena very well. Karl (KARL MARX) was the author of a couple of books that you may have heard something about-- - *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. Karl Marx was perhaps the primary force behind the philosophy of Communism, which was later responsible for the deaths of millions of people in the Soviet Union, China, and other countries. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Perhaps the primary difference between Helena and Karl, and Ruth and Boaz in our Bible story is character. Both pairs lived in the midst of difficult times. We have seen that the setting for the Book of Ruth is described at the end of the Book of Judges:

“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Some among us might find that to be an apt description of our own day. Ruth, like Helena, came from the peasant class. She was a Gentile, a Moabite. The Moabites were traditional enemies of the Hebrews.

Yet Ruth chose to connect with the Jewish Melech family. When her husband died, she insisted upon following her mother-in-law Naomi back to her home in Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah. She also chose to follow Naomi’s God. Upon their arrival in Bethlehem Ruth went out to glean in the nearby fields, following the ancient custom whereby widows and orphans and foreigners could pick up the leftovers after reapers did their work of harvesting.

In the course of doing that, Ruth found favor with the owner of the field, Boaz. Knowing the story of Ruth and Naomi, he was generous to them. Naomi saw an opportunity to make a further connection with Boaz. She set up a plan for Ruth to approach Boaz in the middle of the night during harvest time to snare him as a husband. My interpretation was that this was a worldly method and that there was a better way to do this. But Ruth went along with the plan. She perhaps had little choice. She was dependent upon her mother-in-law in this new and different culture. It was a risky venture. This night could end up in a one night stand. It could lead to an abusive relationship. It could result in rejection by Boaz.

I.

We take up the story then in v. 6 of Ruth #3 (p. 223) as we consider RUTH AND THE NEED FOR WOMEN OF CHAYIL. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. RUTH AND THE NEED FOR...) We read in vv. 6 & 7, **“So she [Ruth] went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.”** Bethlehem was on a high ridge. Trips to other locations in the vicinity meant going down.

The exact occasion is uncertain. We know that it was at the end of the wheat and barley harvesting season, which would have been in early June. Perhaps at the end of the day Boaz was typically staying by the threshing floor to guard his grain. Perhaps there was some kind of harvest festival which was being observed. Perhaps some kind of religious ritual was involved. In any event Naomi knew that Boaz would be there. So she hatched this plan by which Ruth would show up in a nice dress and wearing nice perfume and would make some kind of approach to Boaz.

After he had a full meal and lay down to sleep, Ruth approached him and lay down at his feet. It was a potentially risky move. Boaz could take advantage of the situation. Boaz could reject her.

According to v. 8, **“At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!”** Perhaps by the light of the moon or by the light of a nearby fire, Boaz could at least make out that it was a woman who was laying at his feet.

Verse 9: **“He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.’”** Earlier Ruth had described herself as the lowest class of servant. She was indeed a foreigner and a Gentile and a Moabite and a woman. But now as a result of the acceptance which she has experienced from Boaz and from much of the Bethlehem community, she describes herself using a term for a more respectable servant. She boldly describes herself as a servant who would qualify in that culture to marry someone even of the status of Boaz.

So she challenges Boaz: “Spread your wings over your servant.” Back in #2 v. 12, having learned of Ruth’s commitment to Naomi and to the God of Israel, Boaz said to Ruth, **“The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”** Now Ruth is asking Boaz to be the human instrumentality of that reward and that refuge.

What Ruth is doing is asking Boaz to marry her. The custom in much of the Ancient Near East was that a man would put his robe over a woman as part of an engagement ceremony. Still in some parts of the Arab world a man symbolically takes a wife by throwing his garment over the woman, symbolizing a commitment to her protection and security.

A reference to this custom appears in Ezekiel #16 v. 8. There the Lord describes how He claimed Israel as His bride. (EZEKIEL 16:8) The Lord says, **“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine.”**

There is an important additional statement that Ruth makes in v. 9 of our text. (PROJECTOR OFF) She speaks of Boaz being a redeemer, a *go’el*. There is nothing specific in the Old Testament law whereby Boaz was required to marry Ruth, the widow of the son of some kind of relative. Deuteronomy #25 required the brother of a man who died without leaving a son to marry that widow to produce an heir. There was no brother around to fulfill that responsibility in this situation. There is nothing in the Scriptures that indicates that Boaz was required to step in to fulfill that responsibility.

The Bible did speak of the responsibility of a redeemer. The Hebrew word is *go’el*. (PROJECTOR ON--- GO’EL) A *go’el* was a relative who might choose to buy a relative who had sold himself into slavery to pay off a debt. He might choose to buy back property which a relative had sold to pay off a debt so that it returned to the original family. In legal situations this *go’el* might step in to help out a relative in need. We don’t have full knowledge of the custom at this time. But Ruth is perhaps implying that Boaz has a certain responsibility to become more involved in providing security for Ruth and Naomi. This package plan includes taking Ruth as a wife. Ruth here seems to be going beyond what Naomi had asked of her by including Naomi in this arrangement. Ruth is calling upon Boaz to be their *go’el*, their redeemer. (PROJECTOR OFF) She is laying all

of her cards on the table. She is taking a risk. She could be taken advantage of. She could be rejected.

In v. 10 we learn of the response of Boaz: **“And he said, ‘May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.’”** Boaz says yes. He is flattered by her proposal. Because of the kind of man who he is he first calls upon God to bless Ruth.

He speaks of Ruth’s kindness. The original Hebrew word is another term to which I earlier introduced you. It is *chesed*. (PROJECTOR ON--- CHESED) It is a term that is often used of God’s covenant loyalty to His people. It is variously translated as “kindness, loving kindness, and steadfast love.” It has a parallel meaning with the New Testament term for love *agape*, with which some of you are familiar.

The first kindness to which Boaz refers is probably the loyal love which Ruth has shown to Naomi. It was this love that prompted her to leave her own family and her own people and to follow Naomi to Bethlehem and to worship her God. The second kindness is Ruth’s choice of Boaz to be her husband. Boaz was a considerably older man. Yet she passed over other eligible young men who may have been more likely candidates for marriage. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Boaz continues his words to Ruth in v. 11: **“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.”** What reason does Ruth have to fear? From a worldly perspective she is a Gentile and a foreigner and a woman and a Moabite. She has no financial resources. She has no power. She lives in a culture where everyone does what is right in his own eyes. She has just proposed marriage to an older man of influence and power. She is vulnerable.

Yet Boaz recognizes her worth. It is a worth recognized by the wider community. Because of that he promises to do all that she asks. This man of influence is submitting to her requests.

Literally Boaz describes Ruth as a “woman of *chayil*.” (PROJECTOR ON--- CHAYIL) This was a word which I introduced you to back in #2. There in v. 1 the narrator described Boaz as “a man, a warrior of *chayil*.” I explained that in situations of military conflict those words are often translated as “a mighty man of valor.” The implication is that the man being described is a brave fighter. But in #2 most translators describe Boaz as a man of great wealth. In some Old Testament contexts that idea seems to be present. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word is “strong,” or “firm.” But it tends to have a connotation in its actual usage of “influential,” or “powerful.” The narrator in #2 seems to be describing Boaz as a man of influence and authority and respect in the community. Perhaps he does have a military background. Maybe he is a veteran Clearly he is wealthy.

But now Boaz is describing Ruth as a woman of *chayil*. The implication is that she is a fitting partner for Boaz. The term is applied to women only three times in the Old Testament. But its usage is significant. It appears in Proverbs #12 v. 4. (PROVERBS 12:4). There the writer says, **“An excellent wife [Literally, ‘a woman of *chayil*] is the crown of her husband,/ but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.”**

The passage which gives us the best description of the kind of woman who is being described by use of this Hebrew word is Proverbs #31. There in v. 10 we read, **“An excellent wife [‘a woman of *chayil*] who can find?/ She is far more precious than jewels.”** The remainder of the chapter describes the kind of woman who is envisioned. Her husband trusts in her. She is committed to him and to her family. She works hard. She has a business on the side. She reaches out to the poor. She is known in the community as a woman of character. Such is the kind of person who Ruth is. Such is the kind of woman who is sorely needed in our day.

We lost one of these women recently. We are hosting a service for her here on Tuesday at 11 AM. Some of you knew Theda Cox. A few more of you knew her sister Olynnda, who was an active part of our church until her death in 2015. The two sisters shared many of the same virtues. Theda was a woman of *chayil*. She was committed to her husband and her children and grandchildren. She was a godly woman. I would often encounter her on my runs as she was walking in the park up the street. She would share prayer requests for her family members. She had significant health challenges in recent years, but she did not want her friends to give undue attention to them.

Theda liked to bake bread and give it out to friends and family. Often my family would benefit from this fresh bread nicely wrapped and given to us. When she returned from visits to the family farm in Georgia, she would drop off bags of pecans to many people within her realm of acquaintance. She was involved in various community organizations. She would turn up at the senior center and look for people sitting alone and try to give them a word of encouragement. And she would ask them if they knew Jesus. Oh that the Lord might bless us with more women of *chayil*! More women like Ruth and like Theda!

II.

Consider next BOAZ AND THE NEED FOR MEN OF CHAYIL. (II. BOAZ AND THE NEED FOR...) In vv. 10 & 11 we learn not only about Ruth and her virtuous character, but we also see his character on display. Boaz could have treated Ruth like Karl Marx treated Helena Demuth. He could have had a one night stand. He could have taken on Ruth as a household slave. He could have totally rejected her. Instead, the first reaction of Boaz is a prayer of blessing. His thoughts turn heavenward as he recognizes the virtuous character of this remarkable woman.

In v. 12 Boaz continues his words to Ruth: **“And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.”** Suddenly there is another obstacle which appears in this budding romance. There is a closer relative, a closer *go’el*, who

apparently has first rights to get involved in this situation. This may explain why Boaz has not taken a greater initiative before this in providing a permanent solution to the status of Ruth and Naomi.

So in v. 13 Boaz explains the course of action which is necessary: **“Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”** There is no hint of impropriety in the behavior of Boaz toward Ruth. It would be wrong to send Ruth off in the dark alone. But Boaz cannot yet put his garment over Ruth as a sign of engagement. He must give the closer relative the opportunity to step in as the *go’el*.

Verse 14: **“So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, ‘Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.’”** It is unclear to whom Boaz is speaking. Is there a servant present, a hired worker? Some commentators suggest that Boaz is speaking to himself. It is clear that Boaz is concerned about appearances. He doesn’t want the reputations of either one of them to be stained by a wrong interpretation of the two of them being together in the night.

According to v. 15, **“And he said, ‘Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.’ So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city.”** The standard of measure is unstated. The standard of measure of an ephah, which was mentioned earlier in the story, would be too much. Many of the scholars suggest that a “seah” is implied. This would result in an amount somewhere between 58 and 95 pounds. Even assuming the lower number, this was not an insignificant weight for a woman to carry up the hill to Bethlehem. Ruth was not a frail little girl. The provision of this grain would also provide a cover story for Ruth’s presence at the threshing floor so early in the morning. It could appear that she was on a primary mission in the early cool of the day to bring grain home for her and her mother-in-law.

We read in v. 16, **“And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, ‘How did you fare, my daughter?’ Then she told her all that the man had done for her...”** I suspect that Boaz and Ruth were not the only ones who had a fitful night of sleep. What transpired on the threshing floor had implications for Naomi and her future.

Literally, Naomi says, “Who are you, my daughter?” Are you about to be Mrs. Boaz? Ruth proceeds to describe the events of the previous evening. Boaz, the man of *chayil*, is working to care for Ruth, the servant girl from Moab.

Ruth continues her explanation in verse 17: **“These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’”** Such are the last recorded words of Ruth. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she was bitter. She described herself as being empty. But now Boaz is seeing to it that Naomi is not left empty. The providential care and kindness of God are at work.

The exact motive of Boaz in this generous provision is a bit uncertain. He could simply be demonstrating compassion for his needy relative. He could be showing responsibility as a *go'el* for this family. It could be that he is making a down payment on a bride price. It was customary in this culture for the groom, or the family of the groom, to provide a substantial gift to the family of the bride.

In v. 18 Naomi replies, **“Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”** Naomi recognizes that Boaz is a man of *chayil*. He will do what is right. He will pursue the responsibility which he has assumed of dealing with the estate of the family of Elimelech. He will pursue marriage with Ruth, and he will go about it in the proper way. He will check with the closer relative and give him an opportunity to get involved. In the midst of this culture in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes Boaz is a man of *chayil*.

If our society is in need of women of *chayil*, we are in even more desperate need of men of *chayil*. An NBC poll released this week found that 75% of Americans think that our country is headed in the wrong direction. Most Americans may not be able to describe exactly what the right direction looks like. But we with a Christian world view can identify much of the problem.

There are not enough men of *chayil* in our culture. Former US Department of Education Secretary Bill Bennett wrote a book entitled *The Book of Man: Readings on the Path to Manhood*. He says, **“For the first time in history, women are better-educated, more ambitious and arguably more successful than men. ... We celebrate the ascension of women but what will we do about what appears to be the very real decline of the other sex?”** (*World*, 11 5/2011)

The statisticians tell us that 90% of all homicides are committed in the US by men. Seventy-three percent of American who are arrested are men. Men are much more likely than women to be involved with illegal drugs. (Daily News pod cast, 1/16/2019)

As most of you know, our church has been very involved in prison ministry. According to the US Department of Justice 85% of all young incarcerated prisoners grew up in a fatherless home. The vast majority of teens who have been in my youth Sunday school class in the last ten years have lived in homes without their biological father. The statistics tell us that kids from these homes are much more likely to be involved in negative activities ranging from crime to suicide to drugs to pregnancy outside of marriage.

John Stonestreet says, **“We need men not afraid to be strong risk-takers, to be courageous, to take responsibility, who are self-controlled, gentle leaders and willing providers. We need these real men in our homes and the public square, in churches and in neighborhoods. Remember, God made us male and female. We need both.”** (Breakpoint, 1/9/2014)

III.

The third thing which I would like you to notice about our passage is **BOAZ AS THE PICTURE OF THE FUTURE REDEEMER**. (III. BOAZ AS THE PICTURE OF...) Verses 12 & 13 make special mention of the role of Boaz as the *go'el*, the redeemer. As we look at his life, we see foreshadowings of the future Redeemer. Boaz was the man of character and virtue. In order to perform his task of redemption, he had to qualify as a near relative.

In order for Jesus Christ to qualify as our redeemer, He had to become our near relative. He had to be a human being. He had to be a man of virtue. In fact, he had to be without sin. Also He was confronting people who had a situation of indebtedness, who needed redemption. He had to buy these people out of their indebtedness. The Bible says that all of us are sinners. We are guilty of violating God's laws. The ultimate penalty for that is eternal death.

(GALATIANS 3:13) So it is that we read in Galatians #3 v. 13 in the New Testament, **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--- for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree...'"** The price which Jesus paid to accomplish our redemption was His death on the cross.

As a result of the redemption which Boaz is about to accomplish, Ruth will become his bride. As a result of the redemption which Christ accomplished, those who trust in Him become His bride. Thus we read in Ephesians #25 vv. 25-27 (EPHESIANS 5:25-26), **"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (EPHESIANS 5:27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."** We who comprise the church of Christ are described as the bride of our redeemer.

As was true of Ruth, we have a choice in the matter of accepting the redemption offered by our *go'el*, our redeemer. We are all in debt. We are all sinners. This puts us in trouble before a holy God. Jesus Christ--- perfect God and perfect human--- paid the price for our redemption. Our responsibility is to put our trust in Him. (PROJECTOR OFF)