

## Boaz's Kindness

This story is about much more than God playing the role of matchmaker. We witness the



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powerful image of God shaping a man's heart to reflect God's compassion in such a beautiful way it changes one woman's life and even plays a part in bringing Christ into our world!

(See Matthew 1:5.)

Boaz, a prominent rich man, is described as a kinsman from the family of Elimelech (v. 1). Included in the laws of Israel, landowners were instructed to leave some of their crops, whether grain or fruit, for the poor and foreigners to gather (Leviticus 19:9-10). With the division between haves and have-nots, as well as people from other regions, poverty was a persistent problem. Since there is a family connection, Naomi and her daughter-in-law from Moab are acting responsibly to solve their problem.

We smile, thinking this is a shrewd feminine strategy and would make a lovely romance movie. Consider that Boaz, as both the family leader and wealthy, would already know the story of Naomi's grief and the choice Ruth made to leave her own land (v. 11). In that culture, a woman had few rights and depended on a husband for societal respect and protection. "As it happened," Ruth came to a field that belonged to Boaz (v. 8). Did some of Boaz's harvesters report a foreign woman in his field, or did Boaz notice her and ask who she was? Whatever the gossip may have been, Boaz chose to react firmly and generously, directing Ruth, "my daughter," to stay in his field, close to his young women (vv. 8-9). He ordered his workmen not to bother her and made their water supply available as though she was one of the family (v. 9).

Obviously Boaz lived out his faith in God. He must have gone beyond what his workmen knew about Ruth and learned the full extent of Naomi and Ruth's poverty. Boaz's spoken blessing to Ruth reveals not just his own faith in God, but how that faith shapes his behavior. "May the Lord reward you for your deeds (regarding Naomi), and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" (v. 13). This is noteworthy as a double blessing and its full acceptance of a foreigner among God's people.

Ruth responds to Boaz with deep gratitude. She has lost a husband, left the familiar security of her family and native country, faced the specter of poverty and finds generosity and hope at last. Most of us reading this story do not really understand Ruth's situation, but there are many in our day who do know what it means to be poor, a stranger in this land, without a future and treated as though they are invisible. Boaz goes even further, inviting Ruth to share mealtime with his workers so that she had more than enough to eat (v. 14).

Read the rest of this chapter and discover that Boaz continues to be concerned about Naomi and Ruth. He instructs his men to avoid making Ruth seem insecure in the fields. Naomi and Ruth talk about God working in Boaz's life to help them. In verse 20 Boaz is called "our relative." Other translations use "nearest of kin." But the term is actually *go'el*, meaning "kinsman-redeemer." The word *go'el* refers to a family member responsible for providing for the wife of a deceased kinsman.

We mentioned in last week's study the concept of "levirate" marriage in which a deceased brother's family line could be continued by the widow marrying another brother or close relative. In that role, the new husband was known as the "kinsman-redeemer." Job

## Formations

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Scripture: Ruth 2:1-3, 8-14

19:25 records Job declaring his rediscovered faith in God: "For I know that my Redeemer (*go'el*) lives and that at last he will stand upon the earth." In the New Testament this term is used to describe Jesus redeeming, rescuing or bringing us into the family of God.

Let's step beyond this Old Testament love story and think about how we treat people who are foreigners in our land, people who are on welfare, people who have a different faith. Has there ever been a time when prejudice, social elitism, financial disparity, racism and power have not divided and even destroyed lives? From the beginning, God instructed Israel to be concerned about those who suffer or are different. Christ called Israel back to the purpose of sharing God's love with all the world. As Christians we are to live out the grace of God, regardless the divisions and inequities of life. God does not recognize rich or poor, black or white, native or immigrant. The idea is not out-of-date or trite; the ground before the cross is level!

We face the challenge of poverty and social injustice in our country and world. As Christians can we support prejudice, practice racism, ignore poverty and remain silent in the face of injustice? In my community there are churches as well as interdenominational support and food providers we can minister through. There are shelters for the homeless and programs to help people turn their lives around. But behind all the agencies and programs there must be Christians who are motivated by God's grace to make a difference. I wonder what Boaz's harvesters learned about treating strangers in their midst? Ruth is a love story that transcends kindness, reminding us what it means to live out God's love.