

**Reading:** Ruth 4:1-22

**Theme:** Marriage Joys.

Last week we considered the business that was entered into by Boaz with the unnamed kinsman - who was offered a business opportunity in a legally gathered business meeting. He went for it, but on realising that the small print meant he had to take Ruth as his wife and have a child by her, he declines and hands the responsibility over to Boaz, who also recognised the responsibility, but considered it a great privilege and honour, for he desired to have Ruth as his wife. He was now able to make her legally his wife. There were no barriers, no reasons why he should not claim her to be his wife.

In closing last week, we noted the truth that the Lord Jesus has done everything to make us legally His. There are no legal reasons on God's part why we cannot be accepted; no legal reasons why, if we trust the Lord Jesus, that we will ever be rejected by Him or ejected from being His child. In His accomplishing our salvation, the Lord Jesus satisfied all the legal requirements of the law and justice of God, so that God can be just in justifying us. We are not only saved, but we are safe and secure - safe from God's wrath, punishment and law, also we are secure in the salvation, love and care of the Lord Jesus, God is our heavenly Father.

I want us to look at the rest of this chapter this morning. It centres on the marriage of Boaz and Ruth and so my three headings are linked to the marriage – but the message is not primarily about marriage. So, see:

### **1. The Announcement of the Marriage** (v9 & 10)

Having been given the legal right to proceed as the rightful kinsman, Boaz then proceeds to publically accept that right by making a legal announcement of acceptance. In v10 he said all that was as legally required. He bought the field from Naomi. This was

all the property she had that belonged to Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon and the elders and all the people were witnesses to that. I don't know how he announced that, but I can imagine him pausing and then with a smile of relief and great joy, he announces his intention to marry Ruth. I think that at that point the people then understood that Boaz was a man who had no real interest in the field at all, but his concern and desire was for Ruth. He had obviously set his heart on marrying this virtuous woman and here he is triumphant in his quest - no barriers, no hesitation, no legal problems and he announces his forthcoming marriage with joy and anticipation. More importantly he calls on all around to be witnesses - not only to the fact that he would marry her, but also to the joy he has in taking Ruth the Moabitess as his wife. Interestingly enough we find that Ruth had been married to Mahlon from what Boaz says (v10).

Announcements of marriage, marriage services are to be joyful times, but publicly joyful times. Marriages are to take place before witnesses, so that the man and the woman can testify they have each left mother and father and are going to cleave to each other. Many people today question why should they get married. They see it is a private alliance between two people. It is not. It involves two people – Bible says a man and a woman, who in their love to each other desire to be privately and publicly committed to one another. The marriage service is a public proclamation of their love and commitment to each other - for better, for worse; in sickness and in health; for richer, for poorer until death ends the marriage. Sadly, we know that marriages do not always work out. Yet at the same time society also enters into marriage - as witnesses and ideally as those to help and encourage the couple. Friends, family and society are able to witness a new basic building block of society - a married couple and therefore society as a whole and not only friends and relations, should be witnesses.

Anyway this is not a sermon about marriage in general, but centres on the marriage of Boaz to Ruth.

It is also interesting to note that Boaz calls Ruth "*Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow*" in his announcement. Here I feel is that he emphasises his love for her. She is a stranger, a foreigner, a poor destitute widow, but he says "*I'm taking her as my own wife for I love her no matter what her background.*"

There was one who was far greater than Boaz, who saw people who were not just foreigners, but were His enemies, who had no wealth, who hated Him and they had absolutely nothing to commend themselves to Him, but He declared that He would take them as His own so that they would not live or die without hope. The Lord Jesus and His love for us is quite amazing; if we honestly and seriously consider such an amazing love, we will find it quite breathtaking, mind blowing. Yet it is a real love and He would have us enter into a close and tender love relationship with Himself. For Ruth to marry Boaz was an honour; how much more is an honour for us to have the Lord Jesus as our Saviour? Will we take this One as our heavenly Bridegroom – to be loved and cared for infinitely more than we deserve for both time and eternity? Do we have personal knowledge and experience of this honour in our lives? The announcement of the marriage was made. Moving on we see:

## **2. The Prayer for the Marriage** (v11 & 12)

The elders and all the people as they hear and see such a declaration, own that were witnesses. They are not disinterested witnesses, they are those who truly rejoiced with Boaz and Ruth and wanted to see them prosper. Here's not a cold and formal "*Well done old chap!*" It is a testimony of recognising the love and grace Boaz was showing in his actions.

It is right for us to be joyful witnesses of marriages, but we, like the witnesses, should not stop there, for they went on to pray for the marriage. The elders and people couple their witnessing of the declaration with prayer - prayer for the Lord to richly bless the marriage and the ones entering into it. It's quite remarkable that this little book is so full of the life of prayer of God's people; it hums, throbs with prayer; the prayer life of God's people can be detected pulse-like in it. Naomi prays as she seeks to send her daughters-in-law back to their homes (1:8); the routine greeting of Boaz and his workers is prayer like (2:4); Boaz prays for Ruth (2:12); Boaz prays for God to bless Ruth when she visited him by night at the threshing floor (3:10). Here in this passage we see God's people seeking, praying God's blessing on this soon-to-be married couple and later we see the women praising God for baby Obed's birth (4:14ff).

These people in the book of Ruth have much to teach us. We may think we have to be in a church, or our knees with our hands together and eyes closed to pray. Yes, these things may help us at times, but prayer is to be a natural thing, as we take all to God in all situations, on all occasions. Every aspect of life is to be brought to God in prayer - our life situations, our families, our homes, our daily work, our social life. These, coupled with specific seasons of prayer, are to be part and parcel of our Christian life. We are to be spiritual in our natural lives and natural in our spiritual lives and not have them compartmentalised, or change our words or ways in either.

The prayer these witnesses bring, is for Boaz and Ruth to be fruitful i.e. to have children; that the marriage to be blessed by God in this way. They long for Ruth to be a great mother in Israel - like Rachel and Leah who were Jacob's wives and from whom the 12 tribes sprang. They pray that Boaz would be enriched even further through this marriage and be famous and his name be

continued and extended in history. It's interesting that one of his descendants, Solomon, used his great-great-grandfather's name as one of the names of the strong pillars at the Temple entrance.

They ask the Lord to richly bless them with offspring - like Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah. Genesis 38 records this incident, where Judah is the levir and raises up a son (Perez) in the place of his dead son – even if in unsavoury, sinful circumstances. This prayer was a prayer of blessing - seeking the Lord to richly bless Boaz and Ruth.

In the marriage services it is right and proper to seek God's blessing on the happy couple. Yet we are not to leave it there, but to be ever praying for that married couple, for all married couples and families. There are so many pressures on marriages, so many pressures on the individuals to cause them to split up, to cause breakdown of marriages, to ignore marriage vows. There has been an increase in the divorce rate in recent years; sadly a growing number of Christians are finding their marriages break down – we are not immune or isolated from the pressures of modern life and should not imagine we are. We need to be praying for marriages, working at our own marriages so that God would be honoured especially in the continuing marriages of believers; pray for those who we know that getting married - for God's blessing on them and all the married couples we also know.

Those of us, who have this privilege of marriage, need to be wise, sensitive, careful and prayerful for those who are not married. Not just the young people, but the older ones among us, who for various reasons are in the state of singleness – divorce, bereavement or never married and all the heartache such a state still causes them. We need to be aware of them, be caring for and welcoming to them. Some of them will really need to feel part of a family at times; need ones to talk to, share with, to bounce ideas

and thoughts off, own their fears and concerns and so perhaps we need to tell and show them *"Look there is an open door and open heart when you need it."* It also means we practically show there is an open door and heart of welcome to them. This means families and singles need to be mutually caring and praying for each other in the ongoing life of the church. Just as couples need time together as husband-and-wife, so singles need the company of others, of a family life and both groups need to be wise and caring for one another's needs.

We need to seek God for enabling grace and wisdom as we live life and desire to show the love of the Lord to those in different circumstances from us. We are a community, a family, a body of God's people and that needs to be not a theoretical notion, but expressed in a practical outworking among us. That is briefly something of the prayer for the marriage. But let's see:

### **3. The Blessings of the Marriage** (v13-22)

Boaz and Ruth were married and the Lord enabled Ruth to conceive a child. All those years married to Mahlon and no child and now she is enabled to conceive. The author here owns God's enabling in this matter of bearing children. It has to be seen in the light of the prayer of blessing - as an answer to that. We have to remember that childbearing is not a right, an automatic right even in our day and age. Children are still gifts from the Lord. In this little book of Ruth, we see God's Providence so clearly. Even here in the conception of this child, God's control is still owned. Mysteriously some who would make great parents may not be blessed with children – certainly in past times, even now modern science cannot guarantee people can have children.

We all owe our lives to God. We are utterly dependent upon him - not only for our day to day life, but even for our birth. He knew us even before our conception, knew us when we were but a

fertilised egg and all our members were fashioned while in our mother's womb. Have no doubt, human life is there from the moment of conception. Modern science brings ethical issues right to the point of asking "*When is life human?*" From my reading of the Bible I believe and would argue, that a fertilised human ovum is a human life.

The Bible's view, as expressed here, is that God is the giver of this ability to conceive - even though delayed for many years in some of God's beloved children e.g. Sarah and Abraham; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob and Rachel; Elkanah and Hannah; Zacharias and Elisabeth. So Ruth conceives and she gives birth to a son. What a day for her, Boaz and especially Naomi! This child is a special boy - he becomes her kinsman redeemer and he, as her grandson, had a responsibility to her that outweighed Boaz's. The prayer and desire of the women - possibly the same ones who asked "*Is this Naomi?*" - is that he would be famous throughout Israel. They recognise God had blessed Naomi in the birth of this little boy and so they give God praise for His provision for this grandson for her and for the love and care of Ruth. Sons were considered the most important in OT culture as they were the breadwinners etc. So, for these women to praise Ruth by saying that she was better than seven sons is high praise indeed! This blessing was occasioned by the love that Ruth had for Naomi and such rightly deserved to be praised.

Naomi had lost much, but God in His love and care for her had made this up to her and had given her Ruth and her love and now this little grandson. The boy is eventually named - Obed which means "servant". He grew up and was a father to Jesse; Jesse we know had a number of children and the youngest lad was the one who came to fame - David.

Some 10 centuries later, a child was born in poverty, in a stable, laid in a manger in Bethlehem. He was descendant from Boaz and Ruth and yet He was not a mere baby, but He was God in human form and this one was the hope of the world. Boaz and Ruth are there in the ancestral line of Jesus - see Matthew 1 and Luke 3. From Boaz and Ruth kings arose and by human descent the Saviour of the world - David's greater Son. He is the Lord's Anointed One.

The book of Ruth has many things to teach us. God's providences seen in the little things of life, that God is able to use the tragedies of life to bring people to know and love Him, that God is seen working all things together for good to those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose; that God is doing greater things in history than events indicate or people could ever imagine.

As we close, I want to ask us if we know this God through the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we, like Ruth, come to trust under the wings of the living God and so be eternally safe and secure? If not, He invites us, commands us to do so, and He will cover us with His wings and take care of us as His own and He will delight to do so. Those of us who know this God in this way, we have every reason to rejoice in such a great God and Saviour and bask in His love and care for us, even though we cannot always understand the way He takes us, but we are to remember He loves us more than we can ever imagine and one day we will have a greater understanding and we will praise Him wholeheartedly for all He the way He led us.