

RUTH: REDEEMING THE MESS

ruth 4.13-22: holy consummation

Questions for Personal Study

Trace the progress of their marriage from personal to public to intimate.

Was the public declaration necessary? Why does Boaz insist on it?

On Married Sex: Prov. 5.15-19, 30.18-20; Song of Solomon; Heb 13.4

On Children: Psalm 127-128; Prov. 17.6

How does our culture differ from the Bible's view of marriage, sex, & kids?

Why do you think the story focuses back on Naomi again?

Questions for Study in Community

What is the main theme of this passage? What does the author want to say?

Is this story too "Pollyannaish?" Does it ignore harsh realities of life?

Why might this story be significant for the time of David?

Look for the women in Jesus' genealogy in Matt 1.1-16.

Questions for Staying on Mission

Do you see the mundane details of your life as important? Why not?

How has God worked redemption in your life?

How are you contributing to redemption in our world?

What specific aspects of Spokane are messy and broken?

How should Vintage be about redemption together?

Thoughts for Parents

There is no good time to talk to your kids about sex other than today. While you must be careful to not overdo it, please don't fail to make sex a regular topic in your home. You want your kids to grow up knowing that sex is a beautiful and special gift that God gives to a husband and wife for them to enjoy each other and make babies.

Take some time this week as a parent to consider how you will talk to your kids about sex. There is a helpful series of books entitled, "God's Design For Sex." You can purchase them on Amazon and they have different resources for different age kids. Whatever you do, don't delay having a plan, and don't think that it is too late to get started!

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Blessed Union

As the story of Ruth closes, the narrator has a few final surprises to add to the already overwhelming sense that God is good, loving, and faithful to his people despite the messiness of their lives. We ended last week with Boaz's wise and daring business transaction in which he revealed the "other redeemer" to be a fool and publicly declared his intention to marry Ruth. This week the story picks up as Boaz leaves the official proceedings at the city gate to sweep Ruth off her feet and carry her to his home and into his bedroom to consummate their marriage in sexual union. The final section of Ruth is a celebration of marriage, sexual intimacy, conception, birth, children, grandchildren, and the legacy of godliness.

The Act of Marriage

Boaz is a man of action, and he wastes no time in getting from the city gate to the marriage bed. According to the scriptures, marriage is a covenant or promise between a man and a woman that includes a public declaration to fidelity and a private practice of personal intimacy, including sexual relations. At the end of chapter 3, Boaz and Ruth made their personal promises to one another to be married. In the beginning of chapter 4, Boaz took their promise public and invited the elders and the people to be witnesses to their marriage commitments, thus creating a new social unit in the community. Finally, after the public declaration of making Ruth his wife, Boaz takes Ruth into the privacy of his bedroom and makes sweet love to her. In Boaz and Ruth's marriage we see God's intended progression of married love: a couple pledges their love and commitment to one another, publicly declares it and invites the community to witness and affirm it, and then spends the rest of their lives building the sacred intimacy of their relationship. Sex is a joyful part of that sacred intimacy.

From Adam and Eve's consummation in the middle of the garden of Eden to Solomon's classic poem of veiled eroticism to the New Testament admonition that the "marriage be held in honor and the marriage bed undefiled," the Bible celebrates freedom in married sex. Unfortunately, Christians have historical

been prudish about sex, more akin to a pagan dualism that separates body and soul than to anything truly Biblical. Often the church's message regarding sex is something like, "It's dirty, wrong, and bad, so save it for marriage," a far cry from God's original intent in creating it. While it is true that the Scriptures put certain restrictions on sex, it does so in order to protect and sanctify it in the covenant of marriage rather than to discourage it altogether. In other words, the Bible says no to pornography, masturbation, fornication, adultery, prostitution, and homosexual activity because it says "yes" to the poetry, beauty, and freedom of sex in the covenant of heterosexual marriage.

In a relationship that is not fortified by the personal and public declaration of marriage, we are committed only until our needs are no longer being met. In this kind of relationship, sex is one of the many categories by which we measure our level of fulfillment in the relationship. The strength of a "till-death-do-we-part" marriage covenant gives the context within which true sexual freedom can be experienced because only then is there the commitment to stay whether or not my needs are being met. The marriage vows give the boundaries for great, satisfying, Christ-exalting sexual intimacy!

Conception

Wedding night is a success: Though Ruth was barren for her 10 years of marriage to Mahlon in Moab, she gets pregnant on the first night of the honeymoon! Interestingly, this is only the second time the narrator has directly mentioned the Lord's activities. In the beginning, the Lord "visited his people and brought them food"; here, the Lord "gave her conception." Throughout this story we've looked at God's hidden hand of providence, guiding and orchestrating events from behind the scenes. But the story is bracketed by bread and conception, God's good gifts to his people.

The Scriptures affirm that children are a gift and a blessing from the Lord. The narrator is highlighting for us that this son - like every child - is no accident or chance occurrence. God is at work here! He has brought Boaz and Ruth together in a remarkable way and he has graciously given them a son.

The moment this baby is out of the chute, the women of the town are celebrating and bringing him to grandma Naomi. The last time we heard from these gals was when Naomi returned from Moab, destitute, empty, and bitter. In the birth of this boy the women recognize that God has not left Naomi empty but has filled her, restored her, and brought to her the blessing of a child who will, it

says literally, "feed her gray hairs." God has not intended harm for Naomi but has used tragedy to draw her to himself and fill her life with abundance into old age. The grandson in no way replaces her own dead sons, nor does the joy of his birth remove the pain of that tragedy, but God in his sovereignty has provided a grandson and a heritage for Naomi, something that she may never have had if her sons had not died and she had stayed in Moab. The women also recognize how much Ruth loves Naomi and likewise how valuable Ruth is to Naomi, better "than seven sons," the Hebrew equivalent of the perfect family.

The Final Surprise

The Bible contains a number of genealogies and they are often as exciting to read as the phone book. However, when the women name the boy Obed (which means "servant"), the narrator adds a piece of information that blows the mind: "He was the father of Jesse, the father of David." That's right - *that* David. King David! Israel's greatest king! It is as if the rich and beautiful chapters of Ruth have been little more than introduction to a greater story!

Boaz and Ruth are two insignificant people living in the little town of Bethlehem in the middle of a godless time. They don't experience any profound miracles. They don't have visions or dreams. They aren't by any means the "movers and shakers" of the Biblical story. And yet, totally unbeknownst to them, they are integral players in God's work of bringing Israel the great King David.

This is perhaps the greatest lesson of Ruth: the future is in the ordinary details of today. 1000 years after Ruth, God would bring Jesus through this same family line, a distant but eternally significant implication of the simple faithfulness of two ordinary people. Boaz has brought redemption to Ruth; Obed has brought redemption to Naomi; but both men cannot ultimately undo the mess of sin, foolishness, and rebellion of this world. For that, another Man must come, pay the cost of our redemption, and by his blood set us free.

Have you, like Ruth, come to take refuge in the shadow of His wings? Have you laid at his feet and humbly requested that He take you to be his treasured possession? Have you responded in simple faithfulness and obedience, taking your place in the Great Story of Redemption? One day soon Jesus will return to take us to himself forever and make all things new, clean, and beautiful. He will come to make it right, to bring redemption. And when he does, you will see how your simple obedience in the mundane activities of life have contributed to his kingdom purposes in ways you could never have imagined.