

A Glimpse of God's Love

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The steadfast love of the Lord is seen in the love of Ruth for Naomi and in Boaz's kindness to redeem his family.

The story of Ruth continues the theme of God's faithfulness in dark times. Here we see a picture of God's steadfast love and undeserved kindness to His people. In fact, love is a key theme of Ruth, and redemption is the heart of the story. (In Hebrew, the words for "redeem," "redeemer," and "redemption" occur more than 20 times in the book!) In this story, God shows His faithfulness through His redemptive work, demonstrated here in the love between Ruth and Boaz.



What are some of the most powerful love stories you've read about in books or seen in movies?



What makes these stories resonate with people?



Voices from the Church

"God has sent a guardian-redeemer to bring us out of the empty vacuum of circumstance-dependent existence apart from him into a new world bursting at the seams with a life in relationship with him."¹

—Michael Williams

In the story of Ruth, we see a beautiful glimpse of God’s love in the midst of dark times. Through Ruth’s devotion to her mother-in-law, we see how God’s love is constant and unyielding. Through Boaz’s kindness to Ruth, we see how God’s love is welcoming. And through the marriage of Boaz, we see how God’s love is expressed in redeeming us and providing for our needs. As people who have been redeemed by Christ, we are called to demonstrate the same kind of unyielding, welcoming, and redeeming love to others.

1. God’s love is unyielding (Ruth 1:1-9,16-18).

¹ In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.


⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.


The story of Ruth begins with great tragedy. There was a famine in the land, forcing Elimelech to take his family and leave the promised land in search for the means to survive. Later, Naomi lost her husband and both her sons, leaving her childless with two daughters-in-law. In those days, a childless widow was in a precarious situation, lacking long-term financial support. She would be utterly dependent on the community to help her, but unfortunately, she was in a foreign land. Naomi’s plight seemed hopeless. How would God rescue her from this misery?

Upon hearing that the famine in Judah was over because the Lord “had visited his people and given them food,” Naomi set out to return home. She urged her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to turn away and stay in their land. Why? Because the custom in Israel was for a widow to marry her late husband’s brother and thus continue the family line (Deut. 25:5-10). Naomi had no more sons, and Ruth and Orpah’s prospects were dim, so Naomi urged the women to turn back.

Surprisingly, Ruth decided to stay. While Orpah took the advice of Naomi, Ruth showed incredible faithfulness, even to the detriment of her own future. In Ruth, we see a picture of steadfast, unyielding, and loyal love—no matter the consequences.

¹⁶ But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

 When have you witnessed or experienced this kind of steadfast and loyal love in the midst of pain and tragedy?

 What does it take to become the kind of person who can show such unyielding love?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

19. God Is Love

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn’t the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

Ruth was committed to Naomi's God. In verse 16, Ruth declared that "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God." It is likely that Ruth had already become a follower of the God of Israel. Her husband probably told her of the Lord. But this declaration is striking because it comes right after Naomi had claimed God's hand had afflicted her. Despite the fact that Naomi's experience with God had led to "bitterness," Ruth pledged her undying loyalty to this God!



Voices from Church History

"[God] is a full and overflowing, and inexhaustible fountain of love. And in that he is an unchangeable and eternal being, he is an unchangeable and eternal fountain of love."²

—Jonathan Edwards
(1703-1758)

This is the character of a godly woman who doesn't settle for the comforts of this world. She rested in the unyielding and unfailing love of God for her, and so she demonstrated the same kind of unyielding love for others.

Knowing that we are eternally secure in the love of Christ is the basis for intimacy with God. When we know that He will never leave us, we are free to come to Him openly with our sins, struggles, and fears, knowing that He understands and cares and will never abandon us.



Identify two or three ways "unyielding love" is seen in action. How does God prove His love in these ways?



How do humans prove their love to each other?

2. God's love is welcoming (Ruth 2:1-3,8-12).

¹ Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

Boaz was a prominent man of noble character, a man of God. In verse 3, the paths of Boaz and Ruth cross, as Ruth "happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz." This "happened" was more than just a coincidence. God was directing their steps in His providence to redeem His people: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Prov. 16:9). God was in control.

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn."¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹² 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!"

When Boaz learned about Ruth gleaning in his fields, he addressed her and showed her unusual kindness, well beyond the requirements of the law. In Boaz's expression of love through his compassion and welcoming spirit, we catch a glimpse of the love of God. Like Ruth, we too have been received into the open arms of God when we did nothing to deserve His kindness. Like Ruth, we were separated from God and His people—foreigners who don't belong. And yet, God has shown grace to us through His loving kindness.

The most important question in this book comes from Ruth: “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:10). Boaz’s answer, on the surface, sounded like he was doing so because Ruth had been so good to her mother-in-law, Naomi. But the real answer comes in verse 12, where Boaz said that she had come to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. In other words, “This kindness is coming to you from the Lord, through me, because of your faith in God.” All of Ruth’s noble actions were a demonstration of her faith in the Lord. She’d chosen the Lord over any earthly comforts.



In what ways have you caught a glimpse of the loving welcome of God through His people?



How well do you think our church does at showing this kind of love toward others?

This account reminds us of God’s welcoming love for those who put their trust in Him. Faith in God moves us from being foreigners to family! The same is true even now when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith we inherit God as Father and other Christians as siblings. God makes no distinctions of race or nationality—the family of God doesn’t recognize national borders. As followers of Christ, we who were once not part of the family of God now should reach out to extend the love of Christ to all nationalities, especially to people who do not yet know the love of Christ.



What does an unwelcoming posture toward others convey about our God and His salvation?

3. God's love is redeeming (Ruth 4:13-17).

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Boaz was under no obligation to redeem Ruth, and yet he chose to do so, no matter what it cost him personally. For thousands of years, Christians have seen in the integrity of Boaz a picture of Jesus and His love for us. He is our Redeemer, and He bought us with His blood.

The story of Ruth not only reminds us of the redemption we have in Christ but also how God redeems every part of our lives for His good purposes. In Ruth 4:17, we find a remarkable statement. The women give the son born to Boaz and Ruth a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." This is surprising because we would expect them to say a son has been born to Ruth or a son has been born to Boaz.

But this is the turning point of the book. God took all the miseries that Naomi experienced and He turned them around for good. This book began "in the days when the judges ruled"—a time without a king (see the last verse of Judges)—and Ruth ends with David—the greatest king in Israel's history and the one through whom Jesus would come. How much does this show God's faithfulness!



Notice that the women in this passage praise the Lord, not Boaz or the child. What is the significance of the women giving credit to God for these circumstances?

Ruth is a story of God’s redeeming love. He redeems all our pain, all our heartache, all our ups and downs for His purposes and our great joy. When you think God is furthest away from you, turned against you, or absent, the truth is He is laying the groundwork for something bigger than you could imagine.

But the blessing described in this book was not just for Naomi and Ruth. The last verse of Ruth has enormous implications for us today. The child given is Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered David! David’s descendant would be the Messiah—the Lord Jesus Himself.

This is where we as Christians enter the story. Blessed through the salvation of Jesus, we are part of this family line. We are the beneficiaries of God’s redemptive work in the lives of Naomi and Ruth.

Voices from the Church

“Are we really redeemed (especially from our own self interest) if we are not passionate about passing on the fullness of God’s love to those who do not yet know infinite spiritual freedom?”³

—Marva Dawn



What are some examples of difficult things in your life that God has redeemed and turned around for your good?

Conclusion

In the story of Ruth and Boaz, we see a glimpse of God’s unyielding, welcoming, and redeeming love—the same kind of love we see in the life and ministry of Jesus. As Christ’s followers, we must choose not to live for our own purposes but to be ready to serve God and His calling. May God make us the kind of people who radiate the love of Jesus—unyielding, welcoming, and redeeming—as we seek to be faithful to His will.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Boaz was a family redeemer who showed undeserved kindness to Ruth, a foreigner. In a similar manner, Jesus is our Redeemer who has showed unmerited kindness to us and adopted us into His family.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to respond to His love toward us by extending the same kind of unyielding, welcoming, and redeeming love to others.

1. How are you encouraged by knowing God's love is unyielding, that nothing can "separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39)?

2. In what ways can we demonstrate the welcoming love of God to those who are connected with our church/group? To those far away from God?

3. List some steps you can take to extend God's redeeming love to your family members and coworkers.

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