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The Outsider

Four Scandalous Women Who Changed the World

Ruth 1-4

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Have you ever thought about how many things that define your story are completely out of your control? We could name hundreds, even obvious things like whether you were born in this century or two hundred years ago. Just think about how different your story would be if that were the case or if you were born in Afghanistan or India instead of America or if you were brought up in a home that was loving and taught good values versus one that was highly dysfunctional and just kind of sent you out into the world—confused and wounded—whether you grew up in a home where you were protected or a home where you were abused. I mean all of those things dramatically define your story but you really had no control over those things. Concurrent with that are the decisions that you make—the things that we *can* control. Our decisions are not independent of the things we can't control. As a matter of fact, if you grow up in an environment where you come away wounded, you come away abused, you come away confused, you can come out with some really bad values. All those things dramatically affect the choices you make and bad choices typically don't happen in isolation. Bad choices give birth to more bad choices; they almost always come in a series and pretty soon things are a mess. It's very easy to start to rationalize and start to excuse because, "It's not really my fault because all these things I couldn't control." And as soon as you find yourself in a frame of mind where you are excusing bad decisions, you have in essence given up in life. You have said, "My life is a mess; it's always going to be a mess; it's not my fault. That's just the way it is." But what if it doesn't have to be like that? What if it could be different?

Ruth was a scandalous woman through no fault of her own. She is very different from the first two women that we've talked about. She was a Moabitess. Now to us that may have no meaning, but to a Hebrew reader—a first reader—those words were scandalous. They hated the Moabites. The Moabites were their enemy; the Moabites were pagan, idolatrous people. It wasn't Ruth's fault that she had Moabite blood flowing through her. It wasn't her fault that she was born during one of the darkest periods in the history of the Hebrew people. It wasn't her fault that the origin of her people goes all the way back to Genesis, Chapter 19, in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When God was going to destroy the city of Sodom, Lot and his wife and his daughters escape. His wife looked back and was turned to a pillar of salt but Lot and his two daughters escape. They find themselves living in a cave and the daughters believe that they will never have a family so they decide to get their father drunk and they have relations with their own drunken father to produce children. Out of that would come a son by the name of Moab who would be the father of the Moabites. These people were scandalous from day one. Yet, in the midst of the most difficult circumstances that Ruth had no control over, she made one right decision after another, to the degree that here we are thousands of years later and people still talk about her and people still admire her and there's a book in the Bible actually named after her.

If you have a Bible this morning, turn with us to Ruth, Chapter 1: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth. There it is—right there—short, four chapters. It's a bit of a challenge to go through four chapters in just a few minutes so we'll read some of it and I'll just explain some of it. We pick it up in Chapter 1, Verse 1:

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. 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, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other was Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. **(*NASB, Ruth 1:1-5)**

That kind of sets the stage for our story. We're told this was during the time of the Judges. Last week we were in the book of Joshua and Joshua is a book of battles and victories and swords flashing and faith to trust God. But, at the end of the story, they don't clear the enemy out of the land and that would come back to haunt them the entire rest of their history. The book of Judges then represents what many believe was the darkest time in the history of the Hebrew people. The repeated line was, "Every man did what was right in his own eyes." It was a time of pagan, idolatrous worship; they drifted far from God. It was a time of great violence; it was a time of great evil—just a very difficult time to be alive. The best way to understand the book of Judges is what we call these *Cycles*. There is a repetition of these cycles. It starts with the Hebrew people worshipping pagan gods and engaging in all kinds of idolatrous behavior. God sends along either a plague or an enemy nation to discipline them. They cry out to God for deliverance; God hears them. He raises up a judge, sets them free, for a while they get back on track, and then they go right through the same cycle again. That cycle repeats over and over and over again in the book of Judges. The story of Ruth is impressive but if you put the story of Ruth up against the times in which she lived, it's *really* impressive—a remarkable woman, especially given in the time in which she lived!

This story takes place on the tail end of one of those cycles. They are experiencing a famine which is a part of God's discipline to get His people back on track so He can bless them again. Rather than enduring that and realizing the need to come back to God, Elimelech gets the idea that, "We're out of here; we're going to find greener pastures." And much to our shock, they decide to go to the land of Moab. Now earlier in the book of Judges the Moabites actually conquered the Hebrew people and dominated them for about eighteen years—until they chased them back into their borders. Some time has passed and it appears things are a little friendlier, but to a Hebrew reader this would have been a shocking move—for Elimelech to live among the Moabites. He takes his wife and his two sons and, interestingly enough, his two sons have Canaanite names. I think that tells us that Elimelech had been far from God for a long time. He was quite wealthy; he leaves and goes down into Moab. We aren't really told details; we just know that shortly after that he dies. His two sons then marry Moabite women, which was directly prohibited by the Old Testament law. The Hebrew boys were not to marry Moabite women nor were the Moabites allowed to come into the worship of the Hebrew people. So you get some sense as to what is being said here. So the boys marry Moabite women and then they die. Then, to just kind of wrap up the opening setting, here is Naomi, a Hebrew woman in a foreign land, with two Moabite daughters-in-law, and that's how the story begins. Verse 6:

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food.

Now one of the things that I love about the book of Ruth is just the way it is written. It is so skillfully written. For example, Verse 6 is very careful to word this in a way that we get a clear sense that she should not be in the land of Moab. The repetition there reminds us over and over again that she was somewhere she should not have been. We are told that the famine back home has now disappeared. But she's not living at home—she's in Moab. She hears this so wants to leave Moab and needs to go back home where there is food. God's discipline has been lifted and so you get this sense that it is time to go home.

Now I'm going to tell you just a little bit of the story from there in order to save time. She engages in a conversation with her daughters-in-law. She says, "You know I need to go back home and there's really no hope for you there. There's no future for you there; life would be a disaster for you so you need to go back home. You need to go back home to your families; you need to go back home to your gods. I'll go my way and you go your way." Now there's a lot of discussion as to what exactly were Naomi's motives and I think they were probably mixed. I think on the one hand she genuinely loved her daughters-in-law and I think she believed what she was saying. There was no future for them. For a Moabite woman to come into the Hebrew camp would have just been a very difficult life. They were young girls. "Go home, find a husband, have a life," and I think that was very legitimate. There was also discussion around the fact that for Naomi it would have just added to the shame that her husband died, her two sons have died; they've been there ten years; these two daughters were unable to deliver children. So she comes home empty handed. To add to that, two Moabite women would have just added to the shame, would have just added to the embarrassment, so it was probably also in her best interest that they not come. So it's probably all of that. And at first the daughters-in-law protested, "You know we love you; we want to stay with you," and so Naomi kind of "ups" the rhetoric. She basically says, "You know there is no future for you; I have no more sons. You know it kind of comes with the idea that no Hebrew boy is going to marry you. Even if I got married tomorrow," she says, "and I had sons, by the time they were old enough to marry you, you would be too old to have children." She's kind of being facetious and just emphasized, "There is no future there; you need to just go home." At the end of Verse 13 she says, "The Lord has gone forth against me,"—kind of how she wraps up her argument. She knows now that the reason all of this has transpired is because they were disobedient. They are living in a place that she shouldn't have been and she's living with the consequences of that. In essence she's saying, "God is really angry with me; you need to go home. The last place you need to be is around me." That is the argument. Verse 14:

> **They lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.**

In that verse you kind of get a sense as to where this is going. Orpah kisses her mother-in-law but it's a kiss good-bye. Ruth **clings** to her—it's a very strong word. As a matter of fact it's the very same Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 2:26. If you have a King James Bible it talks about, "…Leave father and mother. Leave and cleave." Well this is the word *cleave*." It means glued together. It's a very strong word. It means that Ruth was hanging on and she was not going to let go. Verse 15:

> **Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. Where you die, I will die, and**

> **there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.** **(Vs. 15-18)**

Now this is one of the more remarkable statements of loyalty in the entire Old Testament. Ruth is a remarkable woman. Somewhere along the way she determined that the God of Naomi *is* God. Having been raised in a pagan, idolatrous environment, somewhere along the way she figured it out. She loved her mother-in-law and she said to her mother-in-law, "I'm with you." Basically in that statement she is saying, "I'm giving up my future. I'm giving up any chance I have for much of a life because I love you and I'm going to take care of you until the day you die." It's just quite a statement of integrity and loyalty. She's determined that Naomi's God is God and that's where she'll take her stand. Naomi decided there was no sense in arguing further, so on they go. Verse 19:

> **So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"** **(Vs. 19-21)**

So they arrive back in Bethlehem and the text tells us there is quite a stir. It would basically mean there was a lot of talk. There was some degree of shock—it's a pretty expressive term. Now was that because Naomi had just aged so much in ten years? Was it because they figured out that Elimelech and the boys were dead? Is it because she was walking through the door with a Moabite woman? I mean probably all of the above but clearly she was the center of a lot of talk. They asked the question, "**Is this Naomi?**" And she says, "**Do not call me Naomi."** Naomi, the name, means pleasant and what she's saying is, "I'm not pleasant any more. **Call me Mara**." That name means bitter . "I'm not pleasant; I'm bitter and so just call me bitter."

Now how would you like to be Ruth, the daughter-in-law? How would you like it that your mother-in-law had become that crabby, that bitter in life? And you're thinking, "Maybe this is just a phase and in a couple of weeks she'll get over it." And then you hear her announce, "Don't ever call me pleasant again; I'll never be pleasant again. I'm bitter and I'll be bitter the rest of my life." Those wouldn't have been real pleasant words for Ruth to hear. It gives you some kind of sense as to what the circumstances were. It's also interesting that Naomi said, "**We left full**." We've said Elimelech was a wealthy man. They apparently still had a lot; they didn't need to leave. It's kind of a picture back to that, but she says, "I **returned empty**". Now again, how would you like to be Ruth and hear those words? Ruth has basically pledged her life away to love and take care of her mother-in-law. But as far as her mother-in-law is concerned, she has nothing. She's empty and, if anything, Ruth is a liability, not an asset, and she reflects that in her statement. So that kind of frames the circumstances which are very difficult. Verse 22:

> **So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab.** (Vs. 22a)

Again, this book is so skillfully written. Look at Verse 22; look at kind of the descending order—in terms of why Naomi is in the circumstances she's in. N**aomi returned**—okay we know she was gone—…**and with her Ruth the Moabitess**. This is the first time that Ruth gets the label. When Ruth was home, she was Ruth, but she won't be Ruth again. Now she's Ruth the Moabitess. As you

read through the story, that label never leaves her. It's just as scandalous as Rahab the prostitute was last week, in the eyes of the Hebrew reader. She is labeled now as an outsider, a foreigner, and life's going to be very hard for her.

Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess. Okay that's a problem but…**her daughter-in-law**…oh that's a bigger problem! She's part of the family...**who returned from the land of Moab.** That's again reemphasizing they were somewhere they shouldn't have been. This isn't a Moabite girl that wanders into the camp and Naomi takes her in. There's this emphasis on: they were gone and they came back and there's a Moabite with her and, by the way, it's her daughter-in-law and, by the way, it all happened because she was somewhere she shouldn't have been. So that's it, all kind of capsulated in that verse.

> **And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."** (Vs. 22b)

Whenever you get the discussion of **harvest**, it is hope filled. So even though there is this emphasis on what has been, there's this emphasis that maybe the story's about to change. Maybe there's hope that is kind of captured in the harvest. Chapter 2, Verse 1:

> **Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go my daughter."** (Ruth 2:1-2)

So they settle in, but they have to survive; they have to eat. And so Ruth says to Naomi, "It's harvest time; let me go glean in the field and let me see if I can bring back something in order for us to survive." We have this brief mention of this relative named Boaz. We kind of get the idea that he's going to be a *player*, but then it kind of moves back to Ruth and Naomi.

Now you have to understand that, in these ancient cultures, for Ruth to do what Ruth was going to do was very dangerous—very dangerous! As a matter of fact there will be an emphasis in this text over and over and over again, that there was risk in this and the need for protection. To be a young woman out in the field unprotected was very risky. Add to that it was during the time of the judges which was very dark and evil and violent. Add to that she was a foreigner and she was at high risk. There is a sense that she even indicates that she is going to have to find someone "in favor of me" or I probably won't come home. But they had no choice; they had to survive, so Naomi says, "Go!" — a remarkable, courageous step on the part of Ruth.

From Verse 3 on I'm going to tell you the story for the sake of time. Basically the way the Hebrew text reads is that Ruth just so happened to come on to the field of Boaz, the relative, and Boaz just happened to come along at that moment. Basically what you have is a theme that goes throughout the book: where you have the sovereignty of God and the choices we make—and they both happen concurrently. So it's really saying that God is orchestrating that Ruth would be right in this place when Boaz would be in this place, so that he would take notice of her. So he does. He sees her; he asks who she is and he finds out she's the Moabite that came back with Naomi and he determines to take care of her. So he says to Ruth, "Don't glean in any other field." Basically the way this worked is, in the Ancient Near East, after the servants went through and harvested the crop, the poor were allowed to come into the field and go in behind them and glean whatever the leftovers were in order to survive on those. And, if you were a generous landowner, you actually left some behind on purpose in order to feed the poor. So that is what Ruth is asking to do. That's what's happening.

Only Boaz comes along and says to Ruth, "I don't want you to leave my field. I only want you to only glean in my field and I will protect you. I have already told my servants not to touch you." Again the fact that is in the text tells us that there was great risk and he is determining to protect her in order that something bad doesn't happen. In Verse 10 then Ruth responds,

> **Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"**

I'm an outcast; I'm not one of you—again that emphasis. Boaz responds by saying, "I know who you are and I know what you've done." And then he rehearses how faithful she's been to Naomi, how she's been willing to give up her own life in order to take care of her mother-in-law and basically admires her as a woman of integrity and character and on that basis he wants to take care of her. Verse 12:

> **"May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."**

Now that's a really important line. Basically he's asking God to bless her, that she might come under God's wing, that she might find her refuge under Yahweh, God. It's an imagery of a bird giving refuge to the little birds. She responds then in Verse 13:

> **"I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."**

So again she's acknowledging, "I'm lower than your servants; I'm an outsider; I'm an outcast …and yet you've dealt kindly with me". Her surprise or shock, again, is a reflection of how most of the Hebrew people would have viewed her.

Well basically the story goes on and she goes home and Naomi says, "How was your day?" and she says, "This is what happened today," and Naomi is, of course, very responsive. And for the first time in this story Naomi kind of perks up a little bit, like maybe there is some hope and maybe we are going to survive and she even affirms that it's really great that Boaz did that because it's very dangerous out there and maybe he'll protect you. So the story in chapter 2 basically ends that way and that takes us through the three months of harvest.

Then in Chapter 3, Verse 1, the harvest season is over and it moves into the next phase. Naomi's been doing some thinking and she realizes Boaz is actually a relative and it's possible he could function as a kinsman redeemer. What she's going to ask of Boaz is very similar to what we talked about with Judah and Tamar—that possibly, as a relative, he would father a child by Ruth to keep the family line going. So she says to Ruth, "You know, honey, you need to take a bath; you need to put on your nicest dress; you need to fix your hair; you need to put on a little make up; you need to put on some perfume and this is what you do. You go back and, when Boaz is sleeping, you pull back the covers at his feet, and you slip in there and you just wait. And the rest is up to Boaz and God." Now this would seem very weird to us, but it was a custom and you can see by the way Boaz responds that he knew what she was asking for. So in obedience and really again at a great risk—there was a lot of risk in doing that because the man could basically do whatever he wanted to the girl—but Naomi and Ruth both trust the integrity of Boaz and are going to carry out the plan. And that's exactly what she does. She gets herself all fixed up; she goes into the night; she finds Boaz;

she pulls back the cover and slips in at his feet. We pick up the story then at Verse 9. He wakes up in the middle of the night and he says, "Whoa!"—that's loosely translated—(laughter) —Whoa...

> **"Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."**

Now once she said …**spread your covering**…same Hebrew word when Boaz prayed that she would find refuge under the wings of God—this is the same phrase. She is saying maybe the answer to your prayer is that you yourself would be my place of refuge, that you would be that wing of protection. Boaz knew immediately what she was asking for and he affirms that she is a godly woman. Rather than going out and finding a younger man and having a life, he realizes that she is doing this on behalf of her family line, on behalf of Nomi, and he affirms her for being a woman of integrity and a woman of character. However there is a little problem. "There is a kinsman who is a closer relative and he actually has first choice and so I'm going to have to talk to him and we'll go from there." In his wisdom he says, "You know, before the sun comes up, you probably need to leave or people will talk and then I'll be in contact." So that's what happens. She slips out; she goes back home; she relays the story to Naomi, and she says, "Boaz will do the right thing," and that's how Chapter 3 ends.

Chapter 4, then, Boaz finds the nearest relative and has this discussion with him. He brings the city council together to be witnesses and he says, "Okay, here's the deal. Elimelech had a piece of ground; as the closest relative you have first right of redemption. Do you want it?" And the relative says, "Yes, that sounds like a good deal; I'll take it." And Boaz says, "Oh, by the way, it comes with a little Moabitess girl and you have to take her too." Well the relative kind of backs up and says, "As I think about this, that's probably not the best deal in town and I choose not to." Now his concern is that he would lose his inheritance. That is a very legitimate concern. Part of the reason that is in the text was to help you understand how costly this was to Boaz. Basically he would have to pay the purchase price for the land and with that would come Ruth. If he fathered a son through Ruth and, of course that was the whole point, that was his obligation. Then that son would technically be in the line of Elimelech and that land would automatically revert back to Elimelech and his line. So in other words he would put out the money and the land for Ruth and then end up losing the land, so he would be out the money and the land, because it would go back to Elimelech's family. And he's saying, "That could bankrupt me," —and that's very realistic. And so he says, "You know I think I'm going to pass on the deal," which allows Boaz to come up and say, "Okay, then I'm going to redeem the land and I'm going to redeem the Moabitess." They kind of go through this ceremony; they sign the deal and, at that end of that part of the discussion, the people give a blessing and we pick it up in Verse 13. **So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife**. (Notice, finally she is not Ruth the Moabitess. Because of this redemption, she is now part of the family and actually part of a very wealthy, influential family. So now she is just Ruth.)

> **So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the woman said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."** (Vs. 13-15)

Quite a remarkable statement! These women say, "God has not abandoned you; God has given you a redeemer. You thought you came back empty; you actually came back with a remarkable daughter-in-law—a woman of courage, a woman of faith, a woman of integrity. She is actually

better to you than seven sons." Now understanding the ancient culture and the value of sons over daughters, this is a remarkable statement—that they would actually say this Moabitess daughter-in-law is better to you than seven sons. The book ends then with this genealogy. I'm going to just read one; there are two of them here.

> **Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. And the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.** (Vs. 16-17)

Ruth was a woman of courage; she was a woman of integrity; she was a woman who learned to understand and walk in obedience to the God of the Hebrew people. I wonder if Ruth, on that day that she said to Naomi, "I am essentially willing to give up any chance I have at life in order to love you and take care of you until the day that you die," I wonder if, in that moment, she could have possibly imagined that she would be the great grandmother of the greatest king in the history of the Hebrew people and that she would actually be found in Matthew 1 in the genealogical line of Jesus the Messiah. Quite a remarkable story!

The story of Ruth is really the story of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It would be unfair to say Ruth just *lucked out*; she just stumbled into this thing. As a matter of fact the emphasis in the text over and over again is that Ruth was a woman of character. She was a woman of integrity. She was a woman of courage. She was a woman of faith and her journey was basically one right decision after another. There is great emphasis on the fact that what caused Boaz to respond as he had responded was because he had noticed her integrity; he had noticed her character; he had noticed what kind of woman she was and that is what drew him to do what he did for her.

There is this beautiful picture of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It was not Ruth's fault that she was a Moabite. It was not her fault that Elimelech and Naomi left the land of promise. It was not her fault that these people despised her. It was not her fault that she was raised in a pagan environment. You could go over one thing after another on the list. They weren't her fault but it did create an environment where her life was a mess and it seemed there was no hope and no future. One right decision after another was the journey to experiencing God's blessing and a whole new life. It's easy if life has been hard, if life has been unfair, if life has been abusive, if life has really created an environment where you carry a lot of frustration, a lot of disappointment, a lot of pain, to begin to justify decisions and to resign yourself to the fact that it's just going to be this way and, in essence, kind of give up. When you think of yourself as a Christian, you may even think that you know you are on God's "B" team or "C" team at best and that's just the way it is. But what if it doesn't have to be that way? Practically speaking, how do I move from this mess to position myself in such a way that God could bless me? That God could use me? The answer is not complicated: its one right decision at a time. It's easy to get overwhelmed by this, but what would it mean for you today to have the courage, to have the faith, to have the character, to make right decisions today. And then what would it mean for you to make right decisions tomorrow and then what would it mean for you to make right decisions the day after? One day at a time. How do you move from the mess into something different? The answer is: one right decision at a time. And it starts with the right decision to pursue the kinsman redeemer. Without that there is no hope; there is no future. Boaz is this beautiful picture of Jesus. That is the reason why they are in the family line. It is this beautiful picture of: this is the kinsman Redeemer—the One who became one of us to become our kinsman in order to become our Redeemer take all of the junk and all of the trash and all the garbage and all the stuff and somehow, in the midst of that, redeem us to something more, to something that God can use to change the world.

The story of Boaz and Ruth is not a business transaction. It's a love story. It's about the romance of redemption. It's interesting how many commentators just don't want to go there. They make it sound like it's kind of a business deal. Think about the text. There was a reason why Naomi said, "You need to take a bath; you need to fix yourself up a little bit; you need to put on some perfume; you need to put on your nicest dress"— because this was romantic. It wasn't sexual but it was romantic. Boaz wasn't a machine. He was a red-blooded Hebrew man and I'm guessing that Ruth was an attractive young Moabitess as well. As a matter of fact he even said, "You could have picked any of these younger guys but to honor your family, you chose me." It's a romance. It's the story of a lover pursuing a lover, which is a picture of the romance of redemption. Jesus Christ is not some sort of religious thing. It's not some sort of a business transaction where you get your ticket to heaven. It's a beautiful love story. It's a story of one lover pursuing another—being willing to do whatever was necessary to pursue his lover and to have you as His wife now and forever—in order that He might redeem you, in order that He might give you life, in order that He might give you what you long for and what you've dreamed of. But it starts with us humbly submitting ourselves at the feet of Jesus and saying, "I need a redeemer; I need help; I cannot do this myself." And so we come to the feet of Jesus and we acknowledge, "I need a redeemer." And we believe, out of love Jesus went to the cross; He died for our sins; He was buried and rose again and offers His love, offers His life and forgiveness as a gift of His grace to redeem us, to experience the life He always intended for us.

This beautiful picture of the kinsman redeemer is so beautiful but so scandalous that who knows—who knows, God may actually want to use you to change the world.

Our Father we are thankful that You are the kinsman Redeemer, that Jesus is the kinsman Redeemer. When we were lost in our sins, desperate with no hope, Jesus pursued us like a lover. Through His death on the cross He has made it possible for us to have new life. Lord, I pray that You would help us not to dwell on the past and not to excuse our present on the basis of something from our past. But, Lord, that we would pursue our life in You and, Lord, that we would seek each day to have the courage, to have the faith, to have the integrity, to do that which is right and to trust the rest into Your hands. Lord, this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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