

Naomi the loveless widow

Pre-reading – Ruth needs to be read in advance of this bible study.

Groups – The sheet at the end of this pack could be given to smaller groups of 3-4 people.

Introduction

The book of Ruth could be re-named 'Three funerals and a wedding'. It is full of both joy and suffering. It describes the story of Ruth and Naomi, as they experience love lost, love gained, and enduring love. We will see that we need Kingdom Courage to love in the way God intends.

The book of Judges says '*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit*', which sounds a lot like our own age. The book of Ruth is set in the middle of this time.

The start of the book of Ruth is bleak. Naomi and her husband moved to a foreign land, and their two sons had married local girls. But then Naomi's husband died, and then both her sons, leaving her alone in a foreign land with her only family these two young girls.

Read Ruth 1:20-21

²⁰ "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Naomi means 'pleasant', Mara means 'bitter'. The turnaround in Naomi's life was quick and dramatic. Naomi is broken-hearted, feels she has no-one, and questions whether God is for her.

Starter questions (5 mins)

- (1) What would you say to Naomi?
- (2) Do you know how Naomi feels?

Naomi cried out of pain for love lost, a pain we can all understand. This study is going to look at how God answered Naomi's prayer of pain.

Moulin Rouge

Some famous lines from the film 'Moulin Rouge' say:

Christian: The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.

Satine: Besides, I can't fall in love with anyone

Christian: Can't... fall... in love? But, a life without love, that's... terrible...

Satine: No, being on the street, that's terrible.

Christian: No! Love is like oxygen!

Satine: What?

Christian: Love is a many splendored thing. Love lifts us up where we belong. All you need is love!

The lines from the film touch on a common lie in our society: 'All you need is love!' This, as with all the most persuasive lies, is close to the truth. All you need is God's love. But that is not what these characters mean, they mean all you need is the love of that 'special someone'. Or you could expand this to all you need is a loving family, which sounds better but is still not true. The truth is 'All you need is God's love'.

Covenant love

Anyway, Naomi felt that without her family, all was lost and she had nothing. But she had forgotten about her daughter-in-law.

Read Ruth 1:8-9,15-18

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What relations did Naomi have? (v9)
- (2) What promises does Ruth make to Naomi? (v16/17)
- (3) What would this have meant for Ruth's quality of life?
- (4) Who do you love like Ruth loved Naomi?

The promises that Ruth made, *'Your people will be my people and your God my God'*, had a ring of God's covenant promises in Exodus 6: *'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God'*. Ruth the Moabitess shows Naomi what true love is. Ruth reminds Naomi of God's covenant love for her. His steadfast and unchanging love is shown to Naomi through her daughter-in-law.

Sacrificial love

Ruth and Naomi goes home and Ruth starts to work in the field of a man called Boaz. Boaz is a good man and is looks after Ruth. Naomi gives some strange-sounding advice to Ruth, to sneak into Boaz's bedroom and ask him to put his garment over her.

Read Ruth 3:7-10

7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

9 "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."

10 "The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor."

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What is Ruth risking here?
- (2) What is Ruth really asking when she asks Boaz to drape the corner of his garment over her?
- (3) Why would Ruth take such a risk?
- (4) What is Ruth sacrificing for Naomi?
- (5) Do we sacrifice what we want for those we love?

Ruth comes to Boaz saying "you have to take me and my mother-in-law." She asks Boaz to help her

live out the covenantal love that she has declared to Naomi. Ruth sacrifices her own future and puts herself at risk to secure the future of her mother-in-law.

Boaz is blown away by this: *“This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier.”* He’d seen Ruth earlier trying to gather grains for her mother-in-law and he was impressed. But now she has shown that she is willing to get married to provide for her mother-in-law.

Redeeming love

In return, Boaz shows he is committed to sacrificial, covenantal love by agreeing to take on responsibility for both women. But under the law he is not the person who has the responsibility. In the law in these days the closest family member had the responsibility to do this, it was a kind of welfare system. There is another man who has the rights of kinsman-redeemer. If you look in Leviticus, you see that a kinsman-redeemer is a relative who restores or preserves the full community rights of disadvantaged family members. So Boaz must ask him to redeem the women first.

Read Ruth 4:2-6

² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.”

“I will redeem it,” he said.

⁵ Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”

⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) Why did the kinsman-redeemer want to redeem at first?
- (2) Why did he change his mind?
- (3) What things may hold us back from this kind of love?

The kinsman-redeemer looks at what he can get out of the situation. He evaluates it and decides that he would be worse off if he redeems them. The kinsman-redeemer turns love into a commercial transaction. We also do this often, we love hoping for something back, hoping for financial, emotional, and sexual security out of the love transaction.

It was the kinsman-redeemer’s responsibility to love, but Boaz steps in to take his place. Boaz steps up in love to redeem Ruth and he brings back her worth. Love has this amazing, transforming effect on people’s lives and can dramatically change their direction. We need not love for our own gain, but to raise up and to redeem others.

It is also important to see that ultimately, as fallen people we can never redeem each other. That we must leave it to another. As Ruth redeemed Naomi by love, she had to ask Boaz to help her to fulfil this vow. In the same way, for us to be able to love like this we will need Jesus to support us and provide us His redeeming love.

The joy of loving

Remember the joy of Boaz at the opportunity to redeem Ruth, even though he had to sacrifice for her.

Even though Boaz had to sacrifice for Ruth, you see him praise God for the opportunity to redeem Ruth. In the same way, we should thank God when He puts someone in our life to love in this way. The end of the book of Ruth talks about another joyful event that comes through this love.

Read Ruth 4:13-17

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Group questions (5 mins)

- (1) Which woman is the focus of the celebration? (v14)
- (2) How does this description of her differ from her own description in chapter 1? (v15)
- (3) Who is ultimately responsible for this change?
- (4) How did the child become famous throughout Israel? (v17)

Naomi takes the child in her lap in what is a wonderful image of an overjoyed grandparent. God not only brings Naomi a redeemer, though she thought God despised her, but He also chooses to bring her a grandson. Even more than that, God provides Naomi with a great line, which went to King David, and on to another baby born in Bethlehem: Jesus.

Naomi's question of God – "Why have you afflicted me, do you not love me?" – is answered. God answers through a loving daughter-in-law, a responsible new son-in-law, a new-born baby, and finally through an ancestor she would never meet, dying on a cross.

Conclusion

How do we know we are loved? Ultimately we know through Naomi's descendant, Jesus, coming to earth to fulfil a covenant promise, dying sacrificially on a cross to redeem us.

How do we love God and others? By sharing the redeeming love we have received, both sacrificially, and covenantally.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) Who are the 'Naomis' placed in your life?
- (2) What holds you back from loving them sacrificially?

Response (15 minutes)

Pray for each member of the group.

You may consider praying into:

- Hurt caused by love gone wrong
- For strength to love others sacrificially
- That God would bring those you can show redeeming love to.

Naomi the loveless widow – Group Handout

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Questions

Introduction: Ruth 1:20-21 (5 minutes)

- (1) What would you say to Naomi?
- (2) Do you know how Naomi feels?

Covenant love: Read Ruth 1:8-9,15-18 (5 minutes)

- (1) What relations did Naomi have? (v9)
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Sacrificial love: Read Ruth 3:7-10 (5 minutes)

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- (3) Why would Ruth take such a risk?
- (4) What is Ruth sacrificing for Naomi?
- (5) Do we sacrifice what we want for those we love?

Redeeming love: Ruth 4:2-6 (5 minutes)

- (1) Why did the kinsman-redeemer want to redeem at first?
- (2) Why did he change his mind?
- (3) What things may hold us back from this kind of love?

The joy of loving: Ruth 4:13-17 (5 minutes)

- (1) Which woman is the focus of the celebration? (v14)
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Conclusion (5 minutes)

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Response (15 minutes)

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Bible passages

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