

The Wonder Woman Series: Ruth

June 30-July 1, 2018

Introduction

- We're in the middle of our Wonder Woman series, where each week we take a look at one of the amazing women in scripture and learn from their lives how we can become more like Christ.
- Today we get to look at two women in the same story: Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. There are things we can learn from each woman and it's my prayer that in the short time we study these women the Spirit will both encourage and convict us as needed.
- So if you would turn in your bibles to the book of Ruth, we're going to go on a little narrative journey and unpack the story of these two women. As you turn to Ruth – which comes right after Judges – I'm going to pray.
- Now because we're basically telling a story today, **PP** we're just going to read certain sections as we go and I'm going to break this outline down into the 4 chapters of the book. So we begin with chapter 1 and we see Ruth's Decision.

Chapter 1 – Ruth's Decision

- The narrative begins by giving us some context for the story. It says, **Ruth 1:1 PP** "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land"
- Days of judges = dark time for Israel: "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (**Judges 21:25**)
- Verse 1 continues and tells us that the man Elimelech chooses to leave the promised land during a famine – during a time of judgment on God's people – and go to a foreign land.
 - He was from Bethlehem – meaning House of Bread – which has no food and goes to Moab, enemies of the Israel, a place that the Lord describes in **Psalms 60:8** as his "washbasin" **PP**
 - Moabites had originated out of an incestuous relationship (between Lot and his older daughter when she got him drunk...**Gen. 19:30-38**); sought to curse Israelites (**Num. 22-24**), their women seduced Israelite men (**Num. 25**), and they had recently oppressed the Israelites for 18 years in **Judges 3**.
 - Moab was no friend to Israel, and yet this is where Elimelech led his family.
 - Even though his name means "My God is King", the narrative of the story shows us that this was a man who did not trust in the faithfulness of Yahweh, and so, like so many others, he chose to do what was best in his own eyes.
- There in Moab after leaving God's promised land Elimelech dies.
- Now one of the main characters of our story appears, Naomi – Elimelech's wife – whose name means "pleasant".

- Sadly, Naomi, and their two sons, chose to remain in Moab and take on Moabite wives, even though the law of Moses had commanded them not to do so (**Deut. 7:3**). They had the chance to return to Israel, but stayed in a foreign country of sin. This may seem like a small detail here, but its critical to see that, like her husband, Naomi continued to do what seemed right in her own eyes instead of trusting in the Lord's provision.
- **Psalms 37:3 PP** "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness."
- After staying in Moab for ten years, having had no children of their own, both of Naomi's sons – whose names mean "weak" and "sickly" meet the same fate as their father.
- And let me pause right here, because this opening paragraph really sets up the key lesson from this whole story. This whole narrative asks the question: **PP** are we going to trust in the Lord when things get difficult and follow His way, or are we going to do what seems right in our own eyes?
 - On one hand, Elimelech and Naomi can be seen with sympathy. I mean they had two sickly sons and the food had run out in their hometown. What were they supposed to do? So Elimelech made a sensible decision and moved his family to a place where he could sustain his family, and when Elimelech passed, Naomi and her sons decided to stay in this land they'd been moved. I mean it seems reasonable, right?
 - But the problem is that this was certainly not what the Lord instructed them to do.
- And how many of us can fall into doing what seems right in our own eyes? Instead of trusting in the Lord, repenting of whatever sin He may be revealing to us, and holding fast to His promises and His faithfulness, we stray away into the traps of this world.
 - Well, all I can say is praise the Lord for His mercy and grace. And we begin to see that in **Ruth 1:6**, when God's blessing had returned to Israel as we see that the famine has lifted.
- And now we're introduced to the two Moabite daughters-in-law **PP** of Naomi as she urges them to return to their people. Both of these women were clearly devoted to Naomi as in **verse 10**, both wanted to stay with her. But Naomi insisted that they remain in their own country.
- While one of them Orpah, decided to remain, the real heroine of our story, Ruth, did not listen to reason and **verse 14** says Ruth clung to Naomi. **PP**
 - **Ruth 1:14**, "clung" to her, (Heb. *Davaq*) – describes loyalty to a covenant commitment...same word used in **Gen. 2:24** to describe the bond that exists in marriage. And as Ruth clung to Naomi she makes the following statement

- **Ruth 1:16-17 PP** “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 will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”
 - Each statement heightens the degree of devotion...ultimately ending with Ruth pledging herself to Yahweh and the people of God.
- And right here we see Ruth’s decision. She chose to commit to Naomi, and more than that to commit to following and serving Yahweh. Say all you’d like about Elimelech and Naomi’s lack of faith in moving and staying in Moab...there was at least enough presence of the Lord’s truth and power in their lives to draw Ruth to Yahweh.
- But the key thing here is Ruth’s decision for the Lord. There are going to be bleak times in our lives, times when our world falls apart around us, Orpah had the best intentions, but in the end turned back to her people in Moab. It is Ruth alone who determined that regardless of the circumstances she would stick by Naomi and more importantly, trust in Yahweh and devote herself to Him as the one true God.
- How do we respond in those trials of our lives? Who do we cling to? Do we listen to the call of the world, do we go astray after the lies of the enemy and rely on our own understanding, or do we decide to cling to the Lord, trusting in His way?
- Now, you would expect Naomi to be excited that Ruth decided to stay with her. But the text shows us that Naomi was nonplussed to say the least.
 - Literally **PP Ruth 1:18** says “When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.”
 - Why? Well, Ruth was a Moabite woman and wouldn’t be welcomed back home, Ruth was a constant reminder of her family’s disobedience, and, practically speaking Ruth was another mouth to feed and body to clothe.
 - So we don’t see a thank you to the heartfelt words of Ruth...just silence. The Lord had some work to do in Naomi’s heart.
 - And, as if to put an exclamation point on it, when the two women arrive in Bethlehem at the end of chapter 1, we immediately see the state of Naomi is one of despairing bitterness.
 - **Ruth 1:19-21 PP** “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 away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call

me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

- We see that instead of acknowledging her family's disobedience and lack of trust, Naomi simply blames God for the state of things.
 - There is no repentance, there is no recognition of God's mercy to move Ruth to stay with her...her eyes are fixed completely on herself and her own misery and she has become a self-proclaimed woman of bitterness – Mara means bitter – who is resentful of God
 - And this is what the enemy always seeks to move us towards. The Lord wants us to soften, repent if necessary, and fix our eyes on Him; while the enemy wants us to resent God, move away from Him, and fix our eyes on ourselves.

Chapter 2 – Ruth's Devotion

- The last verse of chapter 1 tells us that they have arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest – Passover – when the Jews were celebrating their deliverance out of Egypt. And Ruth recognized that this was a perfect time for a fresh start. And so we turn to chapter 2 and see Ruth's Devotion **PP** in action.
 - Now we need to know about the way God's welfare system worked to understand this next chapter. Pursuant to **Lev. 19:9-10** and **Deut. 24:19-20**, the poor were not simply given handouts, the wealthy field owners were instructed to leave extra in their fields for the poor to gather for themselves. In fact, the outside of the fields were required to be left unharvested specifically for the poor.
 - This was hard, hot work and it wasn't safe as bandits would often come along and steal what had been gathered because many landowners didn't follow the law to provide for the poor. You see, this system only worked if the wealthy were generous with the poor.
- Well, Ruth comes and immediately suggests to Naomi that she go and glean in the fields. She is willing to go and do the hard, hot, dangerous work of working the fields for the two of them. Work that is even more dangerous for her because she's a despised Moabite woman. Yet, Ruth remained devoted to Naomi and to honoring her God by serving her mother-in-law.
 - Naomi again offers no thanks and simply sends her on her way (**Ruth 2:2**). Naomi seems so fixated on her own misery that she is paralyzed with inaction. She was certainly capable of working the fields herself...she wasn't so old that she couldn't work – many commentators believe she was in her late 30s to early 50s – but she preferred to wallow in her own bitterness while Ruth went out into the hot sun to work.

- And let's just pause here and recognize that trust in the Lord does not mean waiting around for Him to do something. Like Ruth, we're called to get to work doing the things we know He's called us to do while we wait to see how He is going to move in any given situation.
 - When life knocks us around, we can't be like Naomi and sit and do nothing, making excuses and bitterly demanding that God just fix things already.
 - Trusting in the Lord means pursuing what we know he's revealed to us to do. Faith is always active.
- So Ruth sets to work diligently and she happened to glean in the field of a man who turned out to be a blessing from the Lord. **Ruth 2:3 PP** "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." Hebrew literally here says that "as chance chanced" or we might say, "as luck would have it".
 - Of course, we know there's no such thing as coincidence or chance or luck with God. **Proverbs 16:9** "The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."
 - Ruth knew what she had to do, she was determined to work diligently and show kindness to Naomi and to trust in the God she had devoted herself to, and he led her right to the field of Boaz.
- Boaz means strength, and in scripture the first words of a person show a great deal about their character.
- Boaz first words, **Ruth 2:4 PP** "Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered, "The Lord bless you.""
 - We immediately see that this is a godly man who was loved by his servants – which is a big deal in these times since so many servants were mistreated by their masters.
 - And as soon as he notices Ruth working in the fields he asks about her. And once he learns who she is, he shows nothing but kindness to this Moabite foreigner.
 - Perhaps because Boaz's own mother was an outside – the prostitute Rahab – that he showed kindness to this Moabite woman.
- **Ruth 2:8-12 PP** "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. 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." **PP** 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?" 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. **PP** 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!”

- Ruth’s kindness and devotion to Naomi and the Lord was finally being recognized. In fact, these are first kind words we read spoken to Ruth.
- Boaz asks her to continue to glean in his fields throughout the harvest season, offering her protection, and water. In fact, later on that evening, after she had worked all day, he invited her to eat dinner with him until she was full, and she even brought the leftovers back to Naomi. And then he gave her about two weeks’ worth of Barley to take home as well.
- Ruth showed an amazing amount of devoted kindness to provide for Naomi and the Lord led her to the field of Boaz who himself showed an unheard of degree of kindness to Ruth.
 - Boaz went far above and beyond his duty to the poor as he went out of his way to provide for this foreign woman in need.
 - Now, the contemporary relevance to Boaz’s uber-kindness to this immigrant woman working in his fields is not lost on me. I’m not going to make any political statements about some of the things going on in our country, but I will say this – nowhere in scripture do you ever see godly people mistreating the poor, or immigrants, or those who cannot defend themselves.
 - In scripture, **PP** godly individuals only show kindness, mercy, and grace to such people and God makes clear that this is how He expects such downtrodden men, women, and children to be treated in His name.
 - This text isn’t trying to highlight this scriptural truth, but I’m just going to take Boaz’s example and make sure we’re not missing that.
- So Ruth brings home this feast to Naomi and for the first time in **Ruth 2:20** we see Naomi begin to soften as she recognizes that the Lord had blessed them with the food.
- But when Naomi learned that the man who had showed Ruth such kindness was Boaz, she began to hatch a plan to save the two women out of poverty for good. And the stage is set for chapter 3 where we see Ruth’s Daring. **PP**

Chapter 3 Ruth’s Daring

- Ruth continued to glean in Boaz’s field throughout the remainder of the barley and wheat harvests – about 6 to 8 weeks, which would have put them at the time of the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. Having experienced the first fruits of God’s blessing in the form of Boaz’s kindness, the stage was set for an even greater blessing to be poured out.
- Naomi recognized that Boaz was a close relative of Elimelech’s and therefore could qualify as a kinsmen redeemer for both she and Ruth.

- This meant that he could buy the field owned by Elimelech from Naomi in order to keep it in their family, and Boaz could marry Ruth in order to provide an heir that the land could ultimately be passed on to. In this way, both Naomi and Ruth would be saved out of their poverty and they would have an heir to take care of them as they grew older.
- So in chapter three Naomi describes her plan to win Boaz to Ruth.
 - Though her heart seems to have begun to soften towards the Lord's kindness and faithfulness, Naomi still doesn't seem to fully trust in the Lord to provide as she instructs Ruth to throw herself at Boaz. It seems that Naomi is still doing some things according to what seems right in her own eyes.
 - **Ruth 3:2-4 PP** "Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, **PP** but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.""
 - Now commentators are widely split on how to properly interpret Naomi's instructions to Ruth. But the text here makes pretty clear that Naomi told Ruth to get herself all dolled up and then present herself to Boaz in the middle of the night and then wait and see what he instructed her to do.
 - I mean, you can imagine how that might go with many men. Especially, given the history and reputation of Moabite women.
- For her part, Ruth complies with everything, as she gets all dolled up heads to the threshing floor and waits until the middle of the night before she wakes Boaz. But then we see Ruth daringly diverge from Naomi's instructions. Once Boaz asks who she is, she answers but doesn't remain silent and wait for Boaz to give her instructions. Ruth speaks up and daringly asks for his hand in marriage
 - **Ruth 3:9 PP** "He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.""
 - Ruth uses the language of Boaz's original blessing of her in **Ruth 2:12** "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!" and turns it around to basically ask Boaz to be the one who the Lord uses to answer Boaz's prayer for her.
 - In the ancient times, spreading a garment over someone was to claim them for yourself, and more specifically in this context, to show that you were to

be married. Ruth was directly asking Boaz to marry her, which was an absolutely unheard-of thing in these times.

- Being the godly man that he is, Boaz subdues any temptation toward lust and pushes aside any anger at her forwardness. In fact, he is honored by her request and agrees to marry her and thereby redeem both Ruth and Naomi out of poverty.
 - However, there's a catch; there is another man who is more closely related to Naomi who would have the first right to redeem the land and marry Ruth. In order for Boaz to marry Ruth, this other man must pass.
 - So Boaz sends her home quietly in the early hours of the morning so as not be disgraced and gives her a massive gift of six measures of barley symbolizing the commitment he's made.
- So Ruth's Daring request of Boaz pays off...she doesn't try to win Boaz through any untoward means. She is boldly honest with him and he again shows the kindness of the Lord in readily agreeing to her request.
 - And can we just remind ourselves here that the Lord delights in giving good gifts to his children. **Matthew 7:11 PP** "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
 - When we're pursuing the will of the Lord, we should boldly approach the throne of grace seeking the good gifts He has for us and daringly ask Him to show His loving faithfulness to us.
- And so we come to chapter 4 and the end of the story as we see Ruth's Deliverance through Redemption

Chapter 4 Ruth's Deliverance through Redemption

- Boaz gathers the elders and presents the offer of redemption to the unnamed man who is the closer relative.
 - After initially accepting, he then declines when he learns he would have to marry Ruth, not wanting to sacrifice of his own wealth for the two women.
- But Boaz sees no such problem sacrificing of himself, and immediately commits to redeeming Naomi and Ruth.
- And with that Ruth and Naomi are delivered, and even more so, they are blessed as Ruth and Boaz had a son.
 - Whereas the women of Bethlehem were formerly listening to Naomi speak of how bitter she was over the Lord's treatment. **PP** The story closes with these same women blessing the Lord and praising Him over how well he has treated Naomi and the amazing love and devotion that Ruth had for her mother-in-law.

- **Ruth 4:14-17 PP** “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! 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.” **PP** Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. 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.”
 - One thing that’s interesting here is that the women of the neighborhood named this boy, and his name means “worshipping servant”. To earn this name, Obed must have been a child who loved serving and worshipping the Lord and there’s no doubt that the examples of his mother, father, and grandmother would have played a huge part in producing that within him.

Conclusion

- So as we conclude, I just have a couple takeaways that I want to highlight. **PP**
 - Boaz of course is the type of Christ here who sacrifices and constantly gives of himself to provide for our needs. How thankful we should be for the steadfast love and kindness of our God! His mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness!
 - By the grace of God we should all seek to show such love and kindness to all those around us, especially those who are poor and downtrodden.
 - And then we have Elimelech, Naomi, and Ruth. Each one standing for different types of people in this world. Elimelech heard truth and seemingly disregarded it, doing what was right in his own eyes and found death in the world.
 - You who are hear today are hearing truth, and I’m going to make it crystal clear for us: the only way to life is through submission and trust in Jesus Christ. Unless we receive the God’s free gift of salvation through Christ, and walk in the transformation of the Holy Spirit, as we do the work that the Lord invites us to do until He returns, unless we pursue the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, our way will end in death as we get taken in and lost in this world.
 - I pray that we have no Elimelech’s among us today. Turn to the Lord, leave Moab, it’s not too late.
 - Ruth on the other hand seems to pursue the godly and right decisions at every turn. We know she wasn’t perfect, but the story doesn’t present any flaws within her. Interestingly, in the Hebrew bible – the Tanakh – Ruth comes right after Proverbs, which ends of course in Proverbs 31 which describes the ideal woman to marry. If

you read Jewish commentators they all say this is very intentional as Ruth is the picture of a Proverbs 31 woman.

- Now if you know you're bible, you know that we who have trusted in Jesus are referred to as the bride of Christ. So proverbs 31, and the example of Ruth, show us what we should be striving for by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit moving within us. Let's all make that unshakable decision to pursue Christ, diligently devoting ourselves to Him, Daringly and boldly seeking the good gifts He has for us, as we see His hand of deliverance work time and again in our lives.
- And finally we have Naomi, and if you're like me you relate the most closely with her. She made a lot of mistakes. Clearly she had a faith because the Lord used her to witness to Ruth. But Naomi went through some very difficult circumstances that dimmed her faith.
 - Church, when things go wrong, we need to examine ourselves and see if there is any sin and first repent of that. And if the Lord doesn't show us sin, then we need to cling to Him like Ruth clung to Naomi and keep trusting in his steadfast love and faithfulness. Though we may not understand it, the Lord's way is always the best way in the end.
 - And can I just say praise God that despite Naomi's bitter and doubting heart, the Lord still blessed her through Ruth. We have a God who is exceedingly patient, gracious and merciful and even when we are doing what seems right in our own eyes, he will put people in our lives to bring us back to the truth.
- Church, by the grace of God let us treat others like Boaz did, let us trust the Lord like Ruth did, and let us let go of any bitterness and doubt and joyful worship our God as we are reminded that He has redeemed every one of us through His son just as Naomi did in the end. Amen. Amen.