

Here I Am! – Finding the Hidden God

Thomas Robinson, *Ruth: Life Found in Barren Places 3*, September 11, 2011

Ruth 3:3-13a; 4:9-11a, 14-17

3:⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she (Ruth) came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.

⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!

⁹ He said, “Who are you?”

And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for **you are a redeemer** [goel].”

¹⁰ And he said, “May you be **blessed by the LORD, my daughter**. You have made **this last kindness greater than the first** in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, **do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask**, for all my fellow townsmen know that **you are a worthy woman**. ¹² And now it is true that **I am a redeemer**. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you.” ...

4:⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that **I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech** and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also **Ruth the Moabite**, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.”

¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, **like Rachel and Leah**, who together built up the house of Israel.” ...

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**.

Isaiah 45:15-18

¹⁵ Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.

¹⁶ All ...the makers of idols go in confusion together.

¹⁷ But Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.

¹⁸ For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), ... who formed the earth and made it (he established it); ...

“I am the LORD, and there is no other.”

Leviticus 25:25

²⁵ If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer [goel] shall come and redeem what his brother has sold.

September 11, 2001 – Ten Years

Who could forget that morning? Turmoil, fear, bravery, self-sacrifice. Where is God?

How could God allow it? But it is basic that God allows all of us humans to choose to act against his will. Otherwise we would not be human. Image of a lost world.

Where is God? Where are his people? Bravery, self-giving love, breaking barriers.

Ordinary People, Everyday Love – What’s Happening in the Story of Ruth?

For a Bible book, Ruth is remarkable for how little its focus is on religious matters.

No prophets, priests, sacrifices, revelations. Just ordinary farmers in a small town.

Hard life in the wake of devastating famine. Patriarchal society, strange customs.

Two practices to keep families in existence and on family land: “levirate marriage” to provide heir for the dead (Deut 25:5-6); “Redeemer” (next of kin) *goel*, to buy back land/property sold by an impoverished family, so not permanently lost (Lev 25:25).

Naomi’s situation seems hopeless. No “brother-in-law” for marriage. Abandoned land she can’t farm or inherit. A Moabite daughter-in-law she loves but can’t support.

Ruth has gained Boaz’ admiration. Naomi tries to help her secure needed marriage.

Ruth has learned God/*Hesed*/love through Naomi’s pain. She seeks a redeemer and volunteers for levirate marriage for Naomi. She boldly asks Boaz to be the “wing” of God doing far more for Naomi than law required. Boaz agrees to follow Ruth’s idea.

Ruth bears Obed to be Naomi’s heir (half Moabite), becomes grandfather of David.

Here I Am – The Fingerprints of God

One theme of Ruth is what Carolyn Custis James calls “finding God’s fingerprints.”

Often in scripture God’s actions are described in unmistakable terms (parting the sea, fire from heaven). Ruth is about the more ordinary situation of pain and difficulty when it is hard to see God. He is hidden, and it’s easy to make mistakes.

What Naomi sees: Naomi see God’s fingerprints slapping her face, against her. She gives up on God’s love for her, but still tries to love/help her daughters-in-law.

What Ruth sees: Ruth learns Naomi’s God enough to see that Naomi may be wrong. Her faithful love for Naomi becomes God’s means of embracing/renewing Naomi. She takes Yahweh seriously and challenges Boaz to act beyond the letter of law.

What Boaz sees: A Moabite widow living out Yahweh’s *hesed*. As he follows Ruth’s lead, he lives more fully the faithfulness to God that he really believes in.

What the Writer sees: Looking back from later times: how God used a “worthy woman” of a foreign nation to inspire his people and shape royal line of David.

What We see: The Gospel of Matthew (1:5) highlights Ruth as an ancestor of Jesus. Jesus brings to full clarity all the fingerprints of God’s *hesed* all along the line. He welcomes outsiders and opens God’s family fully to all the nations of the world.

It is only at the end of the story that its full meaning can become clear. We live as the image of God and leave God’s fingerprints – hope and love in a world full of pain. Jesus’ resurrection lets us anticipate the story’s end, life beyond suffering and tears.