

Sermon Notes - Ruth #7

What To Do With Weirdness In The Bible?

“But why was Boaz so hasty, why so fond of the match? Ruth was not rich, but lived upon handouts, not honourable, but a poor stranger. She was never said to be beautiful; if ever she had been so, we may suppose that weeping, and travelling, and gleaning, had withered her lilies and roses. But that which made Boaz in love with her... was that she was a virtuous woman... He thought, if by marrying her he might do her a real kindness, he should also do himself a very great kindness. He will therefore bring it to a conclusion immediately.”

- Matthew Henry, 1714AD

A VERY WEIRD STORY

Many things that were normal 3000 years ago are profoundly weird and offensive to modern readers! Ruth is a poor indebted foreign widow. She comes with baggage - the Israelite man who takes her may be thought of as defiled or unclean because she's from a foreign enemy nation. But even worse, there are legal problems. She is a widow, and in their culture a widow had to be claimed by a near relative of her dead husband. Ruth was not free to marry anyone. The close relative was called a “redeemer” and the law said the closest relative was a “redeemer” and had to take her and pay for her and her land and give her children who would become her dead husband's heirs. In today's story Boaz plays a legal trick so he can marry the girl who he has made a secret promise to! He says to the other man who is legally obliged, “You can buy the field, but you gotta take the girl!

What do we do when we read of strange rituals, bronze snakes, slavery, women treated as property, and sacrificing animals?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW TO DEAL WITH BIBLE WEIRDNESS?

1. IT WAS WRITTEN FOR US BUT NOT TO US

This saying comes from Scott McKnight in *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. The Bible was written to ancient people in their culture and in their language, not yours! We shouldn't assume that we will simply understand everything because it wasn't written to us. However, it is still for us.

2. DON'T CONFUSE DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE

Most of the messes people make with the Bible involve making the 'descriptive' into the 'prescriptive'. This especially applies to the Old Testament. Some read the entire Bible just looking for instructions, commands, principles, for what to do. But most of it is simply not that. But no one reads the book of Ruth and decides that now marriages should be arranged like they were then and that widows should be a bundle deal with their property!

3. NOTICE DIVINE ACCOMODATION

Divine = God. Accommodation = adjusting/fitting.

God adjusts to our height, our level, our language, our culture. God Does not just boom at us in heavenly language but comes at our level, even within our 'messed up' human culture.

“Divine accommodation, the idea that divine revelation had to be attuned to the human condition, is a vital interpretive device in the history of both Judaism and Christianity. Accommodation is present not only in the language, style, and tone of Scripture but in all of human history.” - Stephen Benin “Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought.”

What's the greatest example of Divine Accommodation?

4. SEEK GOD'S GRACE

To read the Bible you need to know the point. The entire point of the book is God's grace - God's unconditional love that came in Jesus Christ. Take a look at Ruth chapter 3. Read again the strange story of a bloke who has to buy a field to get the woman he loves. This strange story is full of hints of God's grace. It's all about grace. Can you find it?

Ruth 4:1-10

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, ‘Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.’ If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.” ⁵ Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.” ⁶ Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.” ⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. 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...”

WHERE IN THIS STRANGE STORY DO YOU SEE GOD'S GRACE?