

A Test of Character

Ruth 2

April 7, 2019

Many years ago I had a friend, we'll call "Dave" - Dave was a guy like me who LOVED TO PLAY SPORTS - it didn't matter what season, we just loved to play - But, one thing YOU COULD ALWAYS COUNT on from Dave was that he would always DRESS THE PART!

If it was a FOOTBALL GAME, he would come in his best BULLDOG REPLICA JERSEY, and KNEE PADS and CLEATS - if it was TENNIS, he would come dressed just like JIMMY CONNORS, complete with MATCHING SHIRT & SHORTS - if the game was PING PONG, he would have on his HEADBAND, his SWEET BANDS and his custom paddle always with a CARRYING CASE!

Dave wasn't always the BEST PLAYER when it came to game time - but he always LOOKED THE BEST walking onto the court or field - He understood the importance of LOOKING THE PART - His motto was, **"If you going to be the best, you have to LOOK THE BEST!"** - And he always LOOKED THE BEST!

Have you ever heard the phrase in sports, **"That team looked great getting off the bus, but the game was a different story!"** - It means that the players LOOKED VERY INTIMIDATING getting off the bus, but they WERE SOMEWHAT OF A LET DOWN when they GOT ON THE FIELD to play the game! - That was Dave! - I'm not saying HE WAS BAD, he was just NOT AS GOOD as he looked like he would be!

OUTWARD LOOKS can often tell you THE WRONG STORY - Many times we draw the WRONG CONCLUSIONS about a person by the way they look or the way they carry themselves when we first meet them - In the first 5 minutes of a conversation, we HAVE SIZED A PERSON UP and we have DRAWN CONCLUSIONS long before we really know that person at all.

This is DANGEROUS & UNFAIR - but we do it all the time - In 1 Samuel 16, the Prophet Samuel went to the House of Jesse to IDENTIFY & ANOINT a new king for Israel - King Saul had been REJECTED BY GOD to continue ruling over His people BECAUSE OF HIS DISOBEDIENCE.

God wanted a man who would OBEY HIM - a King that He could TRUST TO RULE over His people in RIGHTEOUSNESS & TRUTH - He wanted a man AFTER HIS OWN HEART - a man who would VALUE WHAT God values - a man who would LOVE & CARE about the things GOD CARES ABOUT.

So, God sent the Prophet to the FAMILY OF JESSE in the City of Bethlehem - Jesse had SEVERAL SONS - and one by one from the OLDEST TO THE YOUNGEST they came before Samuel - The Prophet, like most of us, LOOKED AT THEIR OUTWARD APPEARANCE of the first son and began to make judgments about him.

Samuel wanted to find a young man who LOOKED LIKE A KING - One who would look good GETTING OFF THE BUS! - The prophet had QUICKLY FORGOTTEN that this was Saul - He was the ultimate HOLLYWOOD MOVIE STAR king! - He was like A DISAPPOINTING PRESENT - Pretty gift wrapping but an EMPTY BOX!

But in chapter 16:7, we read, **But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."**

So many people today continue to make THE SAME MISTAKE Samuel made - They choose a spouse by LOOKING AT APPEARANCE or the PHYSICAL BEAUTY of a person - They hire a NEW EMPLOYEE based on the SUIT THEY ARE WEARING - They choose who they will HANG OUT WITH at school based solely on THE GOOD LOOKS OR POPULARITY of the person.

And so often this causes us to CHOOSE FOOLISHLY - We end up with a SAUL RATHER THAN A DAVID! - The outer packaging REVEALS SO LITTLE of who the person really is - It doesn't tell the story of THEIR INWARD PERSON - there is so much more to a person than the OUTER SHELL.

By LOOKING AT THE HEART, God is able to by-pass the LOOK TEST - God rightly understands THAT THE HEART IS NOT often revealed in the EXTERNALS - Our BEAUTY, our WEALTH, our POSITION OF POWER have very little to do with OUR QUALITY OF CHARACTER - Many times the two just DON'T LINE UP!

Don't you wish we could all LOOK AT THE HEARTS of one another? - Wouldn't it be great if EVERYONE CARRIED SIGNS on our bodies that read, **“Person of high integrity!”** - or **“Dishonest person!”** - or **“Faithful person”** - or **“Two-Faced person!”**

Unfortunately, we don't! - So, the QUESTION BECOMES how do we know the heart of another person? - Certainly, over a LONG PERIOD of time, we can DISCOVER THE QUALITY of a person's heart - Over time we can DISCERN THEIR TRUSTWORTHINESS - But, it can take MONTHS OR YEARS of living life to really know a person - Over time a person's TRUE NATURE is revealed.

You can HIDE YOUR CHARACTER for a season - but OVER TIME it is difficult to hide WHO WE REALLY ARE - Time reveals both OUR STRENGTHS & OUR WEAKNESSES - our GOOD & our BAD!

Our QUESTION TODAY is, “Are there some things we can LOOK FOR IN A PERSON that help us to more quickly LEARN THEIR HEART”? - I think there are - This morning I want us to examine a BEAUTIFUL STORY of a man and woman who DO LOOK FOR THE RIGHT THINGS in one another - this ENABLES THEM to make a WISE DECISION about their future together.

I must WARN THE GUYS out there - This morning's study is a BIT OF A CHICK-FLICK - It all revolves around a LOVE STORY - Boy meets Girl - they FALL IN LOVE - they get married and live HAPPILY EVER-AFTER!

Well, that is the HALLMARK VERSION - but there is actually MUCH MORE to our story - And it holds SOME GREAT INSIGHTS into what we should look for in others THAT WE MIGHT MORE ACCURATELY MEASURE their character & convictions.

We find our FAMILIAR STORY in Ruth chapter 2 - Most of us know the story, but let me QUICKLY RECAP what has happened to this point.

There was a FAMINE in the land of Israel - A LAND OWNER by the name of Elimelech and his wife Naomi decide to LEAVE THE LAND OF PROMISE and move SE to the land of Moab - It appears they did not have the faith to TRUST GOD AND RIDE OUT the famine - Instead they load up THEIR TWO SONS and move to a foreign land in hopes things will GET BETTER - but running from our problems RARELY SOLVES our problems.

And like always, when WE LEAVE GOD'S WILL, things only get worse - Elimelech soon dies and the boys MARRIE UNBELIEVING MOABITE WOMEN.

Within a few years, the UNSPEAKABLE HAPPENS - the sons BOTH DIE as well - Now Naomi is FINDS HERSELF A WIDOW, but now with two widowed daughters-in-law!

In that culture, this created a DESPERATE SITUATION! - These three women wake up with NO HUSBANDS in a world WHERE MEN WERE NECESSARY for survival - BROKEN & BITTER, Naomi decides it is TIME TO GO BACK HOME.

She encourages both of the young daughters-in-law to GO BACK to their families - ORPAH COMPLIES - but Ruth refuses.

She makes this FAMOUS DECLARATION that is sometimes QUOTED AT WEDDINGS - we find in chapter 1:16-17, **But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever 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. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me."**

Ruth makes the decisions to do THREE THINGS:

- (1) to go back to Israel with Naomi;**
- (2) to embrace the God in Israel;**
- (3) to stay faithful to Naomi regardless of what the future holds.**

In our NT UNDERSTANDING, we would say this is Ruth's MOMENT OF CONVERSION & SALVATION - This was her CONFESSION OF FAITH - Notice it involved 3 IMPORTANT THINGS - It was more than just an EMOTIONAL MOMENT of decision - it was a COMMITMENT to a new life.

First, she said GOOD-BYE to her old life - She was WILLING TO LEAVE her family, her friends and her home - she was leaving her OLD LIFE BEHIND!

Second, she made a PUBLIC DECLARATION of her faith in the God of Israel - This was a NOT A PRIVATE RESOLUTION that she could DENY LATER - she went PUBLIC WITH HER DECISION - Letting Naomi know exactly where she stood in her faith.

Third, she was in it for the LONG HAUL - She was STAKING HER FUTURE on this decision - She had no PLAN "B" - **It was goodbye to her past - Embracing Naomi's God - and trusting the future that came with that decision.**

Does this DESCRIBE YOUR CONVERSION to follow Jesus? - Did you LEAVE BEHIND your old life? - Or are you still HOLDING ON to some things, maybe SOME FRIENDSHIP, that are holding you back?

Have you made your DECISION PUBLIC? - Or have you KEPT IT A SECRET just in case you need to change your plans? - Have you told someone? - Have you BEEN BAPTIZED as a public declaration of your identification with Jesus?

Third, have you THROW IT ALL IN to follow The Lord - Or do you have a PLAN "B" just in case this Jesus thing doesn't work out?

Ruth's conversion was the REAL THING - What about yours? - Jesus said, in Luke 9:62 **"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."**

In other words, with Jesus IT IS ALL OR NOTHING - You can't have a HALF-WAY, OR HALF-HEARTED conversion to Christ - To be a Christian it takes a TOTAL COMMITMENT of your life to Him - Somehow this Moabite woman understood what it would take to TRULY FOLLOW THE GOD of Israel - My guess is that SHE HAD SEEN IT in her Mother-in-Law!

In Chapter 2, Ruth and Naomi HAVE ARRIVED BACK in the City of Bethlehem - And they NEED SOME FOOD - So Ruth immediately volunteers to GO TO WORK.

Ruth 2:1 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz.

Ruth 2:2 So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

Ruth 2:3 Then she left, 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 family of Elimelech.

The FIRST THING we learn about Ruth is that she is NOT AFRAID TO WORK - There is not a LAZY BONE in her body - In the Book of Proverbs, we read over and over about the FOLLY OF THE LAZY MAN.

Pro 13:4 The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

Pro 20:4 The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing.

Pro 26:14 As a door turns on its hinges, So does the lazy man on his bed.

Do you want a glimpse into a PERSON'S CHARACTER? - The first thing to look at is THEIR WILLINGNESS TO WORK - Laziness reveals much about a PERSON'S HEART - Ruth has NO HESITATION to go out and work - finding a job and gathering food was at the TOP OF HER TO DO LIST!

Later a man named Boaz will TAKE NOTE OF HER WORK ETHIC - He rightly understood that it TOLD HIM SOMETHING ABOUT RUTH'S CHARACTER!

As a SIDE NOTE, look at how GOD IS GUIDING the steps of this young believer - She "JUST HAPPENS" to wander onto the land of a RICH, SINGLE man - who also just happens to be A NEAR RELATIVE of Naomi - With God, there are NO COINCIDENCES!

God is GUIDING HER STEPS even when she is unaware that it is happening - Let me say to every believer here today, **God is also guiding your steps to place you in the right field as well!** - BE PATIENT - You have been praying and feeling God WAS IGNORING YOUR PLEAS - He isn't! - He is guiding YOUR EVERY STEP even though you are NOT AWARE OF IT - Like Ruth, you must be patient and let God work!

Ruth 2:4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered him, "The LORD bless you!"

Ruth 2:5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

Ruth 2:6 So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

Ruth 2:7 "And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."

Like I said at the beginning, this story is a bit of a CHICK FLICK - For along comes our RICH LAND OWNER - and he immediately NOTICES THE NEW YOUNG WOMAN in the field!

The question immediately comes up, "WHY DID HE NOTICE RUTH"? - the SIMPLEST ANSWER is that this is a SMALL COMMUNITY and he knew everyone else - We LIKE TO THINK it was because Ruth was SOME BEAUTY QUEEN - That she was A KNOCK OUT that no man could miss.

The only problem with that answer is that there is NO EVIDENCE to support it - NO WHERE ARE WE TOLD that Ruth was beautiful - As a matter of fact, THERE IS EVIDENCE latter in the story that she was not as pretty as the rest of the women working in the field.

The Bible NEVER HESITATES to give a physical description of a person who is EXCEPTIONALLY BEAUTIFUL OR HANDSOME - Often the Bible tells us when a particular WOMAN IS GORGEOUS - or when a man is HANDSOME OR MUSCULAR - But that is NOT THE CASE here with Ruth or with Boaz - Their looks are NEVER MENTIONED.

I think this is important because there are other clues that REVEAL THEIR ATTRACTION to one another - What made Boaz TAKE AN INTEREST in Ruth? - He was a WEALTHY MAN - He could have married any woman in Bethlehem - What was it ABOUT THIS MOABITE WOMAN?

And what made BOAZ SO ATTRACTIVE to Ruth? - Yes, he had LOTS OF MONEY - but I think we will see OTHER TRAITS that drew her in - I don't get the feeling Ruth WAS SHALLOW ENOUGH to be pulled to man JUST BECAUSE OF HIS MONEY.

Ruth 2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women.

Ruth 2:9 "Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."

In these TWO VERSES, we have the key to RUTH'S ATTRACTION to this man Boaz - Look at what Boaz DOES FOR HER - He gives to her 3 PROMISES that every woman NEEDS & DESIRES from a man.

(1) He promises Ruth Preference - **"Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close to my young women"** - He communicated that SHE WAS IMPORTANT to him.

Boaz SINGLED HER OUT - He let her know THAT SHE MATTERED to him - She wasn't JUST ANOTHER WOMAN in the field - He was going to make sure Ruth was CARED FOR - He wanted her to know that SHE WAS DIFFERENT - She was the OBJECT OF HIS ATTENTION.

Husband, does your bride know SHE IS SPECIAL? - Have you PROMISED HER PREFERENCE over all others in your life?

(2) He promises Ruth Protection - **"Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you?"** - He communicated that he was going to PROVIDE FOR HER SAFETY - This was VERY IMPORTANT for any woman in that day who HAD NO HUSBAND - She desperately NEEDED PROTECTION.

She and Naomi would have been VERY VULNERABLE in that society - Boaz is letting her know that HE IS LOOKING OUT for her - She will BE SAFE if she will stay in HIS FIELD.

Does your wife SENSE YOUR PROTECTION? - Do you do things each day that COMMUNICATE TO HER that you HAVE HER BACK? - That she is SAFE IN YOUR FIELD?

(3) He promises Ruth Provision - “**when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink**” - Here he is ACKNOWLEDGING HER PHYSICAL NEEDS - Boaz wants Ruth to know that he UNDERSTANDS WHY she is out working in the fields.

Any interest he has IN HER ROMANTICALLY can wait - He will FIRST ASSURE HER that her physical WELL-BEING will be taken care of - That will happen RIGHT STARTING NOW!

Is your wife CONFIDENT YOU WILL PROVIDE for the family? - That the PHYSICAL NEEDS of her and children will be HANDLED BY YOU? - She needs to know this FIRST & FOREMOST.

Because Boaz has these concerns, Ruth is able to SEE INTO THE HEART & CHARACTER of this man - This guy knew what the ISSUES WERE - Boaz's life was not ALL ABOUT BOAZ - He was able to see into the life of another person and UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS - This is NOT EASY to do - Especially for Men!

It is interesting, when Paul DESCRIBED HOW a man should love a wife in Ephesians 5, he PAINTED A PICTURE OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE - one that would place the needs of the wife AHEAD OF HIS OWN - As any HONEST HUSBAND will tell you, this kind of UNSELFISH LOVE takes great effort - It doesn't come NATURALLY TO MOST MEN - Yet, this is exactly what Boaz does for Ruth.

If you are a SINGLE WOMAN here today, let me encourage you to STOP LOOKING for an outwardly attractive man - First look for a SELF-LESS MAN - a man whose character RUNS DEEP ENOUGH TO SEE the needs of another - and one who has the HEART TO MEET those needs.

Every woman NEEDS AND DESERVES this kind of love from her husband - he should provide her with **(1) preference, (2) protection, and (3) provision** - Are you such a man?

Ruth 2:10 So she fell on her face, bowed down 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?"

Ruth 2:11 And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before.

Ruth 2:12 "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

Here we get SOME INSIGHT into why Boaz took notice of Ruth - Why she had FOUND FAVOR in his sight — and why he ASKED ABOUT HER earlier in the Chapter - Notice the 3 things that ATTRACTED BOAZ to Ruth - Remember, it was probably NOT HER LOOKS.

(1) Her REPUTATION - Boaz had been TOLD ABOUT Ruth's KINDNESS towards NAOMI - Her reputation had PRECEDED HER - Just as OUR REPUTATION has a way of going BEFORE US - whether we want it to or not!

Ruth had a good REPUTATION OF KINDNESS - It had developed over time - You DON'T INVENT a reputation - you CREATE ONE - by your CHOICES & BEHAVIOR over time! - Reputations are NOT FORMED in a day or a week - They take time WHETHER GOOD OR BAD.

A reputation is usually a FAIRLY ACCURATE DESCRIPTION of yourself that you have written by your past decisions, behavior, and deeds.

WHAT IS your reputation? - Do you LIKE IT? - Did you know YOU WROTE IT - And only you can CHANGE IT! - It is usually THE FIRST IMPRESSION other have of us - It usually arrives LONG BEFORE WE DO - for this reason, we need to MAKE SURE we send ahead a positive one!

Ruth had done just that - I believe this is why Boaz was interested in IDENTIFYING HER - He WANTED TO MEET this woman who had been SO KIND TO HIS RELATIVE Naomi! - Remember this is HER MOTHER-IN-LAW she is showing all this kindness to!

(2) Her LOYALTY - This is the SECOND TRAIT that drew Boaz to Ruth - She had been a loyal FRIEND & FAMILY MEMBER to Naomi - Even when she had a JUSTIFIABLE WAY OUT, she had remained true to her mother-in-law! - Remember, EVEN Naomi had TRIED TO CONVINCED her to stay in Moab.

Appropriate Loyalty REVEALS MUCH about a person's character - How easy it would have been for Ruth to LOOK OUT ONLY FOR HERSELF - She could have WALKED AWAY just like Orpah - but SHE COULDN'T - Something inside her would NOT ALLOW HER to abandon Naomi.

Sometimes loyalty CAN BE A FAULT - Loyalty driven OUT OF FEAR is not healthy - Loyalty driven out of SELFISH DESIRES is also bad - but loyalty driven OUT OF LOVE & CONCERN for the well-being of another is a WONDERFUL TRAIT - it reveals much about a PERSON'S HEART! - and this is what ATTRACTED BOAZ - this is what CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION!

(3) Her HARD WORK - verse 12 shows that Boaz had TAKEN NOTE OF HER diligence towards her work - He prays that GOD WOULD BLESS her for her hard work!

Again, just a word TO OUR SINGLES here today - don't attach your wagon to a LAZY HORSE! - You don't want to DO THE WORK OF TWO! - Marriage is hard enough when BOTH PARTIES ARE PULLING their weight - but it is JUST ABOUT IMPOSSIBLE when you have to do the WORK OF TWO!

I am going to tell you that after 38 YEARS OF MARRIAGE, nothing is MORE IMPORTANT to me than THESE 3 TRAITS that I have in my wife - Her reputation, her loyalty, and her work ethic are more important to me than I could have EVER IMAGINED when we got married.

I saw them BACK THEN when we were dating - and they certainly ADDED TO MY ATTRACTION for her - but I never knew just HOW IMPORTANT they would be through the year of our marriage - I am so thankful for her.

Ruth 2:13 Then she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

This is the verse that HINTS TO ME that Ruth was not some BEAUTY QUEEN - If she was beautiful, she didn't appear to know it - Certainly, HER VALUE was not wrapped up in her looks - if anything, she seems to LACK CONFIDENCE in her outward appearance.

Her HUMILITY & HER GRATITUDE both shine a light on HER HIGH CHARACTER - Boaz realized that each of these was giving him WONDERFUL INSIGHTS into who this woman really is - Go to verse 17.

Ruth 2:17 So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

Ruth 2:18 Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied.

Ruth 2:19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz."

Ruth 2:20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives."

Ruth 2:21 Ruth the Moabitess said, "He also said to me, 'You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' "

Ruth 2:22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field."

Ruth 2:23 So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.

Naomi gave her daughter-in-law some SOUND ADVICE in verse 22 - **"It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field."** - Naomi realized that God was AT WORK in her life - So, she says to Ruth - "Stay right where you are! - Don't GO WANDERING"!

And this is some GOOD ADVICE for us as well - When you SEE GOD WORKING, stay close - Don't let yourself WANDER FROM the place of blessing - FIND CONTENTMENT in what God is providing!

I see people all the time WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN A PLACE OF BLESSING - God is working - God is blessing - God is providing - Yet, they GET IMPATIENT - OR THEY WANT MORE - they are NOT SATISFIED with what God is providing.

So what do they do? - They roam into ANOTHER MAN'S FIELD - Satan lures them away TO HIS FIELD - And he MAKES PROMISES to them that he never plans to keep - But, once he gets you there, he TRAPS YOU & it gets very difficult to GET OUT!

STAY WHERE the blessings are - It may not be perfect - THIS LIFE NEVER IS! - It MAY NOT BE ALL YOU WANT - Learn to be CONTENT!

Ruth could have gone searching for more - Maybe Boaz wasn't as HANDSOME A GUY as she had dreamed of - but she was wise enough to LOOK FOR THE RIGHT THINGS!

She realized GODLY CHARACTER was hard to find - and she had found it - Boaz did likewise!

Do you know what you are LOOKING FOR in a friend? - In a spouse? - In an EMPLOYEE? - What about in a MENTOR or a PASTOR?

Are you still looking at the OUTSIDE PACKAGING - or have you learned that the HEART IS WHAT MATTERS MOST? - Hopefully, this morning you have learned WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

LET'S PRAY