

The Right Shoe Completes The Outfit

Ruth 4

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I worked as a salesman in a clothing store for a while, and I found that working woman's clothes was much different than than working men's clothes.

Men, they want to get in the store - make the purchase and get out as soon as possible. All I needed to do with men to make a sale, was ask the men their size, and then put together an outfit, hand them the outfit - sale closed, usually they didn't even try on the clothes. Incredibly, most men, were happy with whatever I picked out for them. They were just happy not to have to shop anymore.

Women on the other hand, are hands down, much better shoppers than men. Let me tell you, women know their price points, women know their merchandise and women... well, they are always willing to keep on looking. There is always another blouse, always another sweater, there are always more accessories to rifle through. It never ends. I could work with a woman for a long time, I mean a long time, and still not close the sale.

Then, I learned the secret that every woman in America knows: The right shoes complete the outfit.

Ladies, isn't this true?

You are getting ready to go out and the dress, the scarf, the sweater, the purse, the jewelry all go together - but if you don't have the right pair of shoes - forget it - you have to start all over.

The shoes are the key to great outfit.

After I learned that, it was easy. I was always in the top five in sales in the store.

Here's what I would do: I would make sure I knew every item that was on sale in the store and walk the customer through each area starting with what was on sale. It didn't matter where I started with the customer - purses, hats, dresses, accessories - what mattered was where we ended up - Woman's Shoes. I would walk with my customer through the store putting together an outfit from whatever was on sale, a purse, some costume jewelry, a belt, a blouse, a pair of clam diggers, then hand them off to one of my buddies in women's shoes....cha-ching, worked every time.

The right shoes completed the outfit; The right shoes completed the transaction.

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Ruth 4

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We see this same thing in our Scripture this morning: We see in verse 7, a shoe is handed to Boaz, and the transaction is complete. The shoe is handed to Boaz, and this signals that the life of Naomi is about to turn around, the bitter cry of emptiness that Naomi let out to the Lord is about to be answered.

Remember last week I pointed out that though the name of the biblical book is Ruth, it really isn't a story about Ruth; Now Ruth makes herself available to be used by God and Ruth is our model of a selfless person - she really is a hero, but the story is not about Ruth.

Boaz, he also makes himself available to God. Boaz is a very generous man...he goes way out of his way to help these two women, but the book is not about Boaz either.

This is the story of Naomi and how she takes a woman who has no hope and redeems her life. This is a woman who is forced to relocate because a famine causes an economic collapse. This is a woman who first loses her husband and then loses her two sons, it is as if everything that really mattered in her life has been taken away from her. Naomi doesn't have anything to look forward to in life, so she heads back home to Bethlehem to die - she bitterly tells her old friends back home, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." (verse 1:21)

She even tells folks to call her bitter, and who can blame her?

Now, remember, Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth, insisted on returning home with her. Ruth has taken care of Naomi every step of the way. She has been her companion, she has provided an abundance of food and has even go so far to make an agreement with Boaz to bear a child for Naomi. A child that would be called Naomi's child. A child that would be raised by Naomi. A child that would legally be Naomi's child - and NOT Ruth's child.

Ruth, our hero, is willing to give up her first born child, so that her friend and mother-in-law would have a legal heir - Ruth in essence is offering to replace the two sons Naomi lost, with her own son. Ruth sacrificially gives up her son for the redemption of another. Sound familiar?

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Think about that, especially on Mother's Day. What a close relationship these two women must have had, for Ruth to even consider giving up a child, and add to that the fact that in her previous marriage, Ruth was unable to conceive for ten years. Could you do that?

Many over the years have said that Ruth is a story about two people who fall in love. People claim that this is a storybook romance. Yet, the word love is not mentioned once in the entire book of Ruth. We never see anywhere that Ruth loves Boaz, or that Boaz loves Ruth. Clearly in the original Hebrew text, romance between Ruth and Boaz is only alluded to. We the readers have to fill in the blanks.

Now, even though there is no mention of love in this story, the Book of Ruth is very much about love, except it is not so much about romantic love as it is about sacrificial love, which in the NT is known as Agape love. THIS is the kind of love God has for us.

God uses both Ruth and Boaz to fill the empty cry of Naomi. Ruth and Boaz allow God to work through them, these two do what they do out of mercy for Naomi and not for selfish gain. Both Ruth and Boaz will not gain by helping Naomi, they will only lose. Ruth loses a son, Boaz loses a tremendous amount of finances.

BUT, as we started to see last week, this is truly how the kingdom of God works. Those who strive to place themselves on top, end up losing out; but those who strive to serve others and move to the end of the line - God will reward them and place them first.

So, this morning our story picks up with Boaz seeking out the other kinsman-redeemer. It is apparent that there are only two men who are kinsman-redeemers, Boaz and another man, and that's it, so one of these two men must act as the kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman-redeemer was a close relative who was obligated to marry the widow of a relative and then produce an heir in the name of the deceased man. The other man is first in line, Boaz is last.

See, in the kingdom of God, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. It is no accident that Boaz is last, it is no accident that Boaz will be first.

Let's stop for a moment and ask the question that has to be asked about Boaz. If this story is not so much about romantic love as it is about sacrificial love, then why is Boaz so nice to Ruth? It certainly appears that Boaz is excessively generous to Ruth because Boaz finds Ruth Beautiful.

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Ok, has the story ever mentioned anything about how Ruth looks? No. Her appearance is never mentioned is it? Her appearance may not be mentioned, because, Ruth may have been as average looking as anyone. In reality, there may have not been anything special about how Ruth looked. Well, then why is Boaz so nice to Ruth?

If you have your bibles open, look at verse 21 of chapter 4. "Salmon was the father of Boaz." Who was Salmon married to? Let's turn to Matthew 1:5, "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab."

Remember the whole story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho? Remember that the Hebrews sent spies into Jericho before they attacked. Those spies found refuge in the home of a prostitute named Rahab. She protected them and helped them escape from the city. Rahab and her family were spared when the Hebrews attacked Jericho. Rahab later marries Salmon and Rahab is - the mother of Boaz.

Oh. So that's why Boaz is so generous to Ruth.

Ruth is a foreigner like Boaz's mother Rahab, who leaves her people and comes into a relationship with the Lord God. Ruth is like Rahab because both women take a great risk to save others. Ruth is like Rahab because she was once the enemy of Israel who then becomes a great friend of Israel. Rahab is a complete outsider, and then became an honored member of Israel.

Boaz sees Ruth and remembers his own mother. Boaz knows how hard it was for his mother to leave her people and strive to become accepted with a new people. Boaz sees Ruth, and Boaz has great mercy upon her, because Boaz of all people knows what it is like to be the son of an outsider, the son of a former enemy, the son of a woman who has lost everything, and so he can't help but be generous.

What Boaz's mother Rahab did for him growing up, Boaz in turn does for Ruth. Sort of an ancient way of celebrating Mother's Day. Boaz has promised Ruth that He will be her redeemer - except that another man is the real redeemer and Boaz has to convince this man to step aside...without letting him know that he wants him to step aside.

The process described here is an administrative process, it is not a legal process and the issue is the custom of redemption not some kind of civil suit. The elders are there as

witnesses, not as judges. We know this because Boaz opens things by addressing the other man not the elders.

There would be one entrance into the town of Bethlehem. The town would have a wall built around it with only one way in, and one way out. Everyone would have to pass through the one gate to go to work in the morning, kind of your ancient form of a traffic bottle neck. Ancient cities were very compact and were built along very narrow streets. The only substantial place to congregate in most ancient cities would be right inside the city gates where there would be the ancient version of the town square - it would be both a marketplace and a civic center. Boaz sits here knowing the kinsman-redeemer would have to walk by because it is the only way out of the city.

Notice that the man who Boaz deal with, this man's name is not given, the man is nameless. But, remember, in chapter one we found that the meaning of the name of Boaz is unknown, no one knows the meaning of the name Boaz; So in essence, Boaz is also nameless man. So....we have two nameless men sitting down to discuss the fate of who this story is really about - Naomi. The men remain nameless because this isn't about their redemption, in fact they are the agents of God in the redemption of Naomi.

The outcome of this transaction will not benefit either men. The outcome of this transaction will renew this woman Naomi in a way she could never imagine. The impossible is about to happen, and neither of these men have a clue to the significance of their transaction.

We tend to think that the everyday decisions we make are of no real significance. We tend to think that if we do this, or if we do that, it will not have a significant impact on someone's life....how naive we are.....

Boaz gathers ten men. Nowhere in the OT is it specified how many men would make quorum. The town of Succoth had 77 elders Judges 8:14. Most likely Boaz just gathers whomever is available.

In verses 3 & 4 Boaz bring the issue of the land before the other unknown man. Boaz emphasizes the land issue, though it would be well known that the welfare Naomi was part of the bargain and the other man would have considered taking care of Naomi as part of the deal.

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At first Boaz presents this as a no lose situation for the man. The man would gain new property for his family, he would gain income from crops grown on the land and then the property would be permanently part of his families holdings when Naomi died and, Naomi was unlikely....actually it would be impossible for her to produce any heirs. Now, even though it says buy inverse 8, the reality is that NO money would change hands. See this man will basically be given the property forever. He will be able to pass it on to relatives and only have to support Naomi in her last few years. Not a bad deal.

Then Boaz mentions Ruth, the Moabitess.
Hah, there's the rub.

Boaz exposes all the implications. Apparently, these are the only two who could redeem the land. It is an either or choice. Ruth is presented as the wife of the deceased, highlighting the obligation to produce and heir for her former husband, Mahlon. Boaz says literally in the Hebrew that the man is to "to raise the name of the dead" by producing an heir through Ruth.

The man immediately backs down. Why? There are many problems that come with Ruth. Perhaps she would be a second wife - his wife would not be happy about that. (I can't imagine that ANYONE would be happy). Polygamy was permitted in Israel, but most men could only afford one wife anyway (I will refrain from any additional comments).

If Ruth did have a child, then the property would go to the child. Additionally, Ruth's child would be eligible to inherit from the man's current holdings, thus reducing what his children would inherit, and in fact, some of his family's land could potentially be permanently lost to Naomi's family. Though children were a financial asset, as they could help in the fields, they could also be a drain on resources. There also could be additional children from Ruth, which would further reduce the inheritance of his own children and increase the loss of his own land to Naomi.

The no lose deal now looks like a dot com investment risk.

Let me just say this: Remember that Bethlehem is only about 200 people at most and everyone in town knows about Ruth, including this man, and yet, this man quickly rejects Ruth when it is pointed out that she is part of the transaction. Again, let me say, that the chance of Ruth being just your average looking person is highlighted by this transaction. To this man Ruth is just another woman. There is nothing about Ruth that catches his eye.

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But, Boaz knows what this man does not - Ruth is a hero, Ruth is a woman who is so selfless, she will even give up her first child to honor a friend. Who could turn down character like that?

Now here in verse 7, we reach the truth that every woman in America knows: The right shoes completes the outfit; The right shoes complete the transaction.

The man takes off his shoe and hands it to Boaz and the transaction is complete. The nuance in the Hebrew is "to make come true" meaning that God was clearly involved in this whole transaction. It means that what happened here was more than a real estate transaction - it was an act of redemption instituted by God himself. Boaz is the human agent, God is the real redeemer. The handing over of the shoe is like God's final act of redemption for Naomi. Naomi who had no hope, is about to become a mother again....

Remember, no money is changing hands here, as at this point in Israel property could not be bought and sold - this is not Boaz buying a bride.

Why the whole shoe thing?

In OT the feet symbolize power, possession and domination. Moses removes his shoes at the burning bush (ex 3:5) he shows that God has the power.

According to ancient middle eastern Nuzi texts, shoes symbolized ownership in property transactions. The old owner of a property would lift his foot from the property and place the new owners foot on it. In the OT to set foot on land was associated with ownership. (Duet 1:36, 11:24, Josh:3; 14:9)

In those days fields were surveyed in triangle tracts. The size of the tract was determined by the distance that a man walked between these three points of the triangle. The man had walked the perimeter establishing ownership with his shoes. The shoes on the feet of the man established the size of the property and so the object that established ownership was handed over to the new owner - the shoe. The shoe completes the transaction.

Here we see the sobering truth of what Ruth has done for Naomi.

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At this point, the other man now has no rights, Ruth was legally the substitute widow for Naomi. Ruth steps into the place of Naomi, all Ruth produces will be considered the fruit of Naomi.

The implication we see in verse 10 is that the son produced would carry on the name of all three men mentioned - thus raising them from the dead. These men were considered lost forever, but Ruth will raise their memories, she will make their blood line alive again. So it is said that Boaz is the redeemer, but Ruth is the one who raises the names from the dead.

The elders now proclaim a blessing upon the upcoming wedding. They mention Rachel and Leah who are Israel's founding mothers - but they also mention Tamar, who like Ruth, was a foreigner who also saved a family line from extinction. They wish her a grand destiny.

Boaz and Ruth now become noticeably absent at this point in the story, this is because the story is about Naomi and her redemption. Notice that Ruth is still the daughter-in-law (verse 14) as her son is considered, not the son of Boaz, but the son of Mahlon her deceased husband. This son actually replaced all three men Mahlon, Killeen and Elimelech. The point is to emphasis that the son is Naomi's.

Yes, Ruth gives up her son.

Will she have a relationship with him? Yes. But, understand that the child is legally Naomi's and legally Naomi has full rights as a parent over the direction and raising of the child. This is Naomi's child.

Yes, what Ruth does for Naomi, is quite sobering, especially if you are a mother here today. And her gift, isn't only a gift of a child, it is the gift of life.

This is why the women say that Ruth is better than seven sons, the number of sons that was considered the best hope for a continued family name - Ruth out shines them all for Ruth has preformed the highest act of sacrificial love, the highest act of agape love, the giving of away of her own son. The woman of the village rightly see Ruth as a Hero. The woman say that the little boy will sustain Naomi in her old age - literally "to cause life to return" and there in verse 16 we see the tender scene of this old woman with this infant on her lap. She was empty - now she has her hands full!

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So, Naomi's life had come to a dead end. She lost everything that she cared for in life, she was at a complete loss, she was empty, she lost her family and was too old to start a new family. In her eyes, nothing could be done that mattered.

But, see, you matter to God.

Those little painful details you worry about - Jesus sees them too.

The impossibilities in your life that you have given up on - Jesus is aware of them too.

Naomi didn't see the twist in her life coming in her time of bitterness, Naomi couldn't imagine how God could do anything in her life.

Yet God's answer to her bitter cry had been with her all along. Naomi saw the answer to her bitter cry everyday - it was right in front of her eyes. She ate with the answer to her cry, she worked with the answer to her cry, she slept in the same house as the answer to her cry.

And finally, there was the right shoe that brought it all together.....and God had completed the impossible once again - what impossible thing will God do for you?