

Give Me a Tissue

One Plus One Equals One – Ruth – God’s Romance

I try to bear through a romance movie for my wife from time to time.

For some reason, romances do not interest most men. They would rather watch a movie that involves world domination rather than romantic boredom. Many women, on the other hand, enjoy sitting down with a box of tissues and a blanket as they cry through a movie. The idea of swords, guns, and fiendish monsters does not attract many women. Some people have tried to mix the two genres, but it is hard to have romance in the midst of carnage. One usually wins out over the other.

Women think men’s movies are unrealistic and men think women’s movies are complete fantasy. Could it be that men and women are different?

What would you consider to be essential parts to a good story?

Every good story needs good parts to it. It needs something to get your attention at the beginning as it develops the story, and then along comes a villain of sorts, something that has the potential to destroy the efforts of the hero. Finally, in the end, the hero comes through and, if good, the movie will have a sequel.

Every good writer knows the importance of plot development. The author of Ruth is no different.

Have you ever heard a sermon on Ruth? They are fairly rare as many see Ruth as an insignificant book, but I tend to disagree. Ruth provides some powerful insight into the world of marriage and the role of the husband and wife. (See previous study)

Ruth has the makings of a great love story.

If married, how did you meet your spouse?

We all have different stories. Some of them, I am sure, are pretty crazy. Ruth is no different.

In order to understand the story of Ruth, we must first see the context. Context for this story can be found in Judges 21:25. The world is crazy and everyone is doing whatever they want. No one is following the commands and laws that were laid out on Mount Sinai. It was a land of chaos and carnage. Not much different than today.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Judges 21:15

"Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband."

Ruth 1:1-5

Then we come to Ruth. Ruth is the story of people doing the right thing at the right time in a land that is doing everything wrong. It is a story that goes against the flow and shows the intimacy of God in the affairs of man as He preserves His people.

Read Ruth 1:1-5.

Here is the heartbreaking story of a father and mother having to flee the country because of famine. They come to a neighboring land where their sons meet some nice girls and marry. Eventually, the husband and sons die, leaving behind Naomi and two newlywed widows. Here is where the tissues come out.

Now remember, we want to see the roles of marriage played out in the book of Ruth, so we will first take a look at Ruth.

How would you describe Ruth?

We have already established that the woman's role is the helper to man. This is not a role of weakness or frailty, but of honor and respect. As the woman discovers her role as helper, she begins to understand her position in Christ and in the marriage. Ephesians 5:22 calls women to be subject to their own husbands. The word uses here carries with it the idea of helper and can be seen in the life of Ruth.

As the story goes, Ruth cannot leave Naomi alone. In fact, Ruth makes a profession of faith in 1:16-17. She exclaims that YAWEH will be her God. She makes the decision to stay.

After they return, Ruth takes up a job gleaning in the fields. Through the course of her work she meets Boaz. As their relationship develops, it comes to a point where Ruth takes the initiative to present herself to Boaz for marriage.

Some commentators believe this book was written by a woman because it shows the initiative of the women in the story. The author is debatable, but the initiative is not. Ruth was willing to subject herself to the Jewish religion and then later subject herself to Boaz. Ruth did not lose her identity in subjection; she merely recognized the importance of her position as she fulfilled the role of a wife.

How would you define submission?

When Paul tells wives to submit or subject themselves under their husbands, he understands submission as an individual voluntarily placing themselves under the leadership or authority of another

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

Ephesians 5:22

individual. The husband is the leader and the wife willingly, voluntarily places herself under his leadership and protection.

Notice, men, Paul commands the women to subject themselves under your leadership. He does not tell men to force their wives under them. In some minds that is not subjection, but slavery.

Probably the best example of subjection is Jesus Christ. Jesus willingly subjected Himself to the Father yet He did not lose His identity or make Himself less God. It is the role Jesus has in the Godhead. This is clearly seen in the Garden when Jesus prays.

So, the role of the woman is to help her husband as she subjects herself to his leadership.

Wife, how are you doing with that?

Now for the husbands.

Take a look at Boaz. There are several aspects that help us to understand love.

How would you describe Boaz?

Boaz **protected** Ruth. Remember the times were evil and there were men that would have taken advantage of Ruth in a heartbeat, but Boaz sought to protect her. He noticed she was new and asked about her. He then told her to stay in his field and if anyone touched her, they would deal with him. Then there are fighting words!

Boaz **respected** Ruth. In 2:10-11, we see Boaz respecting Ruth and honoring her. She fell to her feet in subjection and humility, asking why he would treat her so fairly. He replied, “It is because your godly character precedes you.” He had heard about the sacrifice she had made and the love she had shown to Naomi. He had heard about the desire to take care of her and live a life of poverty. He respected her.

Boaz **fought** for Ruth. Boaz was not the nearest kinsman redeemer. There was another. This other person had the obligation by Jewish law to marry Ruth and bear a son who would be able to reclaim the inheritance that was to be given through Naomi’s husband. Chapter three and four highlight this battle for Ruth. The other relative did not want to deal with the whole thing and gave up his right. Boaz comes to Ruth and takes her to be his bride.

Husbands are to love their wives through provision (spiritual, as well), through respect and appreciation, and through affection and commitment. These are not the characteristics of a dictator leader, but a loving head that longs to have his wife next to him.

“But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; 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 I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.’”

Ruth 1:16-17

Husbands, how are you doing with that?

As husbands lead their homes with love and respect, wives will desire to help their husbands as they subject themselves to their husbands’ leadership. As wives subject themselves to their husbands’ leadership, husbands will be more loving. The roles work off each other!

What is one thing that you can do today to fulfill your role (love or help)?

What is one thing you can do today to fulfill your position (head of home or subjection to head)?

You may be tempted to wait until the other person starts working on their role, but why wait? Waiting will only keep you from experiencing the blessing of fulfilling your role. Your role is not contingent upon your spouse. It is contingent upon you. Are you going to decide to play the part? It may mean going against the flow. Ruth and Boaz did. Look where it got them!

Finally, probably the most powerful lesson that can be learned is “*chesed*.” This is a Hebrew word that translators have struggled to translate. *Chesed* is a word used for covenant. Inherent in this word is an undying loyalty and love. Sometimes it is translated loving-kindness in the Psalms, but that does not quite capture the meaning. There is the loyalty side of it, and it is used of Ruth’s devotion to Naomi and is inherent in the marriage relationship. The marriage is a covenant with a foundation on *chesed*, an undying, unconditional loyalty and love for your spouse. It is the same *chesed* God has with us.

How would this understanding of *chesed* impact your marriage?

I need to match my *chesed* with God’s *chesed*. I am glad it is not the other way around, because we would all be in trouble.

Oh, and just in case you missed it, there is a happy ending. Ruth not only bore a child, but this child was Obed, grandfather to King David.

King David. Jesus Christ comes from his line.

Now that is a blessing.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?
