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“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy, 3)

Love Does Not Need a Language

Nothing in the world compares to love. Love is a beautiful feeling which cannot be defined and understood logically. True love transcends barriers and touches lives in a profoundly significant manner. Love does not need a language but it always makes its presence known. Love goes the extra mile to brighten up someone’s world. It defies all reason and yet conquers all!

The story of Ruth is not just the story of Ruth. It is the story of binding love between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. It is also the story of great responsibility and clinging on to hope despite all adversity. It is a sublime story that moves our heart and instills us great faith in the goodness of our Lord. It is also the story of how we all choose our ways of life and reap what we sow.

Ruth and Her Mother-in-Law

Ruth of the Bible has fascinated people down the ages. To this day, her extraordinary decision to stand by her mother-in-law despite all odds remains an enigma to many. But, nevertheless, Ruth’s bold moves strike a cord in the hearts of those who can identify with her closely. The story of Ruth is in fact a celebration of love.

As the story of Ruth unfolds, we understand that Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law had lost both her sons besides her husband. Bereft of hope and solace, she urges both her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah to go back to their homeland. Orpah goes but Ruth clings to her mother-in-law, knowing fully well the challenges ahead of her. The love which Ruth has for the family continues even after the death of her husband. Her love for Naomi is so great that she sticks to her at any cost.

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.” When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. (Ruth 2 : 16-18)

Ruth chose to stay back with her mother-in-law to help her in her grief, even though she could have easily returned to her place of birth and to her parents. Ruth was not of the same ethnic group as her mother-in-law. This fact in itself would have driven away any woman from her mother-in-law in those days of ethnic rivalry and animosity. Ruth’s determination to share in the grief of her mother-in-law and to help her even with her hard labor to earn a living should be seen in the background of her age. Ruth was still young, she could go back to her parents as was the custom, and could hope to begin a new family, getting married once again. She seemed to have no concern for all these possible comforts, but chose to be a great comfort herself to her mother-in-law, a woman who had lost everything and had nothing to offer to Ruth.

Mother’s Love and Responsibility

The two women return to Bethlehem. It is the time of harvest and in order to support her mother-in-law and herself, Ruth goes to the fields to glean. The field she goes to belongs to a rich man named Boaz, who is kind to her because he has heard of her loyalty to her mother-in-law. Ruth tells her mother-in-law of Boaz’s kindness and she continues to glean in his field. Later as the story develops, we learn that Ruth finds favour in the eyes of this rich man by name Boaz in whose fields she is employed initially.

This Boaz is a close relative to Naomi’s husband’s family.

Acts of Kindness to a Widow

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. *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.” 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?” 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. 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.” (Ruth 3: 8-12)

Mother’s Heart of Naomi – Negotiating a Marriage for Ruth

It is interesting to note that Naomi had orchestrated all the events leading to the culmination of the marriage between Ruth and Boaz.

Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor at night and tells her to “uncover the feet” of the sleeping Boaz. Ruth does so, Boaz awakes and Ruth reminds him that he is “the one with the right to redeem.” Boaz says that he is willing to redeem her through marriage but he adds that there is another kinsman who is closer to her as relative to redeem her than him.

Doing Things in Appropriate Ways – It is Marvelous in Our Eyes!

Then he said, “Blessed *are* you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you *are* a virtuous woman. (Ruth 3: 10-12)

The kinsman whom Boaz meets at the city gate first accepts to purchase the land from Naomi’s hand but upon learning that he must also marry Ruth he recedes. This man saw only the material things and rejects Ruth by which he loses the immortal opportunity of being inscribed in the genealogy of Jesus.

And the close relative said, “I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem *it*.” (Ruth 4: 6)

Boaz is Blessed!

Boaz saw only the hidden beauty of loyalty, chastity, love and obedience in Ruth and in turn received the blessings of being known in the genealogy of our Savior.

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed *be* the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.” (Ruth 4; 13- 15)

God stands by the oppressed and needy. God has a deep concern for the welfare of his people, materially, physically and spiritually.

Naomi continued to live with them and even gets the privilege of nursing their baby who is named Obed. The Bible tells us that Obed was the grandfather of King David in whose line Lord Jesus was born.

What Made Ruth Do What She Did?

The question now is what made Ruth do what she did, which revolutionized her life, besides her mother-in-law's?

We do have subtle hints to suggest that when Naomi's sons were alive they were all one big closely knit happy family. This is made known through Naomi herself when she tells both her daughters-in-law, after the death of her sons, "Go return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."

This open declaration of Naomi of her daughters-in law's kindness, bears testimony to the fact that the members of the family shared a special bond with one another. Love was predominant in their relationships. Even after the death of their husbands, it was love which constrained the two daughters-in-law to linger in their mother-in-law's presence. However, a little later, we see a marked difference between the two women. Orpah goes back to her country. On the other hand, no amount of coaxing by Naomi could prevent Ruth from leaving her mother- in- law.

Wisdom Against Practical Profit

Naomi sounds rather practical when she asks them to go. But Ruth reacts in a different way. She gently asks Naomi to refrain from entreating her to leave. Before one could even conjecture as to why Ruth chose to stay back, Ruth herself is seen giving the answer. She tells Naomi, "Whither thou goest, I will go, where thou lodgest, I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God.' Then Ruth goes on to say, "Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought death part thee and me."

Ruth's marriage to Naomi's son had been the defining moment of her life. Her marriage had made her change her belief systems and conviction. She had integrated herself so well into the family that she had given up her gods and her own people back in her home country. All she knew was, that the God whom her husband's family worshipped would be hers and his family would be hers, even if it were a remnant and there was no turning back. Ruth had endeared herself so much to the family that there was nothing left to go back to, in her native land. Yes, the celebration of love had not ended even after the death of her loved one. It took on a new dimension with renewed interest.

The question still may arise: what made Ruth cling to her mother-in-law when everything was supposedly over for Ruth, at least in the worldly sense? It may be difficult to answer this question. However, we know from the story that Ruth had touched God's heart when she went that extra mile. This extraordinary move of hers positioned her for an outpouring of a mighty blessing from God. We see God sending His own son, Jesus to be born in Ruth's line. Ruth

would be forever remembered as the woman whose colossal faith in a mighty God drew her close to His heart! What a lesson to learn from the story of Ruth. The question now is “ Have we done anything to touch the heart of God? The answer lies in the ordinary things that lie before us---those things or sometimes even people whom we take for granted. Can we make a difference in someone’s life? If we can answer this question positively, we can certainly make the world a better place to live in!

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