

5 Ways to come closer to the Lord

Ruth 3:1-5

Many of us are preparing for their vacation dates. It is often at this time that we can take a break from the responsibility of family, studies or work and focus on ourselves. A holiday is also used as a time to reflect on the accomplishments made in the last few months. In our thoughts, many of us realize that we have neglected our bible reading, studying, and prayer. We realize that this is a high priority and make it a goal during our summer break to repair this relationship with the Lord. We want to come closer to the Lord and to know Him better. In the book of Ruth, we see that there is a true story about redeeming love. But we also see that there is also a story behind the story. Gergö began this month's sermon theme of 'look at the invisible'. There are a lot of unseen elements of the church and Jesus in the story of Ruth and Boaz. *The main point I want to focus on in this story, among many things, is that God has taken the first steps to pursue a relationship with us. He remains faithful and committed to us.*

There is a Moabite woman whose name is Ruth. She is a pagan who is outside the commonwealth of Israel. She marries and her husband dies shortly after. She is brought to faith in the Lord by Naomi and has a kinsman-redeemer named Boaz whom she marries. In summary, a Moabite gentile woman marries the bachelor of Bethlehem and they live happily ever after. This story is a brilliant illustration of the invisible elements of the close relationship of the church to Jesus Christ. Ruth portrays the church and Boaz portrays Jesus Christ.

The Mark of a true Christian is a love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The desire of every child of God is to know Jesus Christ personally. We want more than redemption, we want a relationship. We want more than the gifts, we want the giver. We don't want to just know something about God, we want to know Him personally. Naomi offers Ruth 5 points of advice on how to know her redeemer Boaz in a very personal and close way, and we too, need to look at the invisible elements to understand the story of the church as the bride of Christ, Christ who is our redeemer and bridegroom.

1 Be freshly cleansed (v3)

In order to come closer to Boaz, Naomi first advises Ruth to be freshly washed. If this is what Ruth must do to come closer to Boaz, then Christians too must do it if we would like to come closer to the Lord. But I am not talking about legalism or religion. I want to simply acknowledge the fact that we are sinners, and therefore not holy. **James (4:8)** says if you want to come closer to the Lord you have to be clean. One cannot worship the Lord with dirty hands, defiled hearts and double minds.' Paul also says **2 Cor. 7:1** *'beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.'* The unseen element of physical cleanliness, is spiritual cleanliness.

Let's imagine wanting to be near our lover, but they've been working in the garden for most of the day and they are dirty, sweaty and smelly. Can you imagine having an intimate relationship with someone you love but they don't care enough to take a bath. I understand that cultures are different about bathing. What I am pointing out is that we are coming to the Lord, not just our lover. God is saying you cannot come closer to me if you are unclean.

Leviticus 11:44 - *'For I am the LORD your God Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.'*

a) Question: How are we cleansed as Christians and believers? Short answer, we are cleansed by the Word of God.

1) **Eph 5:25-26** *'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for*

her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,'

In summary, The word of God cleans our spirit like water cleans the body.

b) Question: How does the Bible/word of God cleanse us? Short answer, the blood of Christ.

1) **1 John 1:7** *'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.'*

2) **James (1:23)** says the word of God is like a mirror reflecting an image. The bible reflects both God's image and our own. So we read the Bible, but the Bible also reads us. That's the reason some people don't like to read the Bible. There's the washing of water by the word, which reveals the sin. But there is also a solution to sin, to be washed in the blood of Christ. To have this washing there needs to be confession. A confession is agreeing with God that "sin" is wrong. And when we become washed in this knowledge, the blood of Jesus then cleanses us from all sin. And what God calls clean, let no man call unclean.

In conclusion, the very first step of instruction Naomi gives Ruth in order to come close to her redeemer is to be freshly washed. For us, we should acknowledge that Jesus has taken that first step for us. We have been given the Word of God (bible), knowledge of sin and how to confess, and because of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, we may be presented to the Lord (Father) as pure and holy.

2 Be fragrantly consecrated (Naomi says to 'anoint yourself') vs3

Whenever women go out on a date they use perfume. Women are smart and know exactly what they're doing. Naomi is giving good instructions: take a bath and wear perfume before going on that date. She wants Ruth to go to the redeemer with a sweet aroma. In the Bible, we learn a lot about who received anointing or perfumes. Kings, brides and priests were all anointed. A king's presence was always a delight to be near. A bride would smell sweet and attractive to her lover. The anointing of a priest meant a consecration that was set aside for God's purpose.

***Song of Sol. 1:14 & 4:14** 'My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi.', 'nard & saffron, calamus & cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh & aloes, with all choice spices'. (paraphrase)*

Ruth didn't have Müller or Douglas perfume stores. They had the fields full of spices and made a perfume compound from oil. These fragrances would speak of love and intimacy.

a) Question: If we as Christians are cleansed by the word and washed by the blood of Christ, then what gives us a sweet smelling fragrance for our redeemer? In short, a christian's anointing is the Holy Spirit.

1) **1 Jn. 2:27** *But the anointing that you received from him abides in you...*

2) **2 Corth 2:15** *We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved...*

The holy spirit gives us the fragrance of Christ. So when we come before the Father, we are freshly cleaned and anointed with the fragrance of Christ through the Holy Spirit! We have all known someone who wears this anointing. They walk into a room and you just smell the joy and fragrance of the Lord.

In summary, Naomi instructs Ruth to be freshly washed and be fragrantly anointed in order to come closer to the redeemer. Like the first point, God has taken this step for us. After Jesus' death and resurrection he sent us the Holy Spirit as an anointing, a fresh aroma to the Lord.

3 Be properly clothed (put your cloak) vs3

Naomi knows that Ruth is now a prospective bride. A prospective bride should dress their best to impress. In the time of mourning, one would change their daily clothing into a widow's clothing. Clothing that they could work in, tear holes in and roll in the dirt. Naomi is saying to Ruth, the time for mourning the death of your husband is over. Go bathe, put on perfume and dress appropriately to meet your redeemer, Boaz. When Jesus was ready to begin his public ministry, he read from the book of

Isaiah 61:1-3 *1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me (...)3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.*

a) Question: How does a christian come before the Lord with clothing described as beauty, joy and praise? The short answer is to replace our complaining spirit with a spirit of praise and accept God's gift of salvation.

Isaiah 61:10: *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

In our human logic, we tend to develop our attitude as a result from life experiences. Therefore, we can develop an 'accept it or deny it' attitude towards God in our prayer life. For example, God, accept the fact that I blame you for things going wrong in my life! God, I don't want you in my life until I need you to fix things because I lost control. Our attitude is not one of praise but complaint and mourning. Naomi is instructing Ruth to be freshly cleansed, be fragrantly anointed and appropriately clothed with garments that symbolize beauty, joy and praise. She is no longer mourning or wearing the clothes of a widow. As Christians, God has gifted us the garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. We are the prodigal sons and daughters who have returned to the father and He dresses us up to be presented to the redeemer so that we may be restored to life...

Luke 15:24 *'For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.'*

In summary, Ruth is to stop wearing the clothes of complaint and mourning and dress appropriately; likewise, we are to do the same and dress ourselves with beauty, joy and praise through the garment of salvation and the robe of righteousness gifted to us by the Lord. He has taken yet again another step toward building a close relationship.

4 Be fully committed (place yourself at feet of the redeemer) vs3-4

Naomi has given some very strange instructions at this point of the story— at least to us modern westernized educated individuals.

Question: What does it mean to 1)stalk a man as he eats and drinks, “2)find the place where he sleeps and uncover his feet and 3) sit at the foot of his bed until he wakes up and sees you stalking him?

The answer is: The most sacred place to be on earth is at the redeemer's feet. At this time, these actions would be interpreted as signs of full commitment to the person. Ruth was communicating to Boaz that she was ready and willing to take him alone as her redeemer-husband. There is nothing sensual or indecent here. Boaz was asleep on the threshing floor alongside the family in the same room. The unseen element is this: our relationship to Christ our redeemer.

Question: Can we be in a close relationship with Jesus if we are not fully committed to him?

The answer is absolutely NOT!

In conclusion, Naomi is challenging and instructing Ruth to be fully committed to her redeemer and to show it. Notice that this point is not something the Lord gifts us. The Lord has washed us clean through his word and his blood, anointed us with the sweet fragrance of the Holy Spirit and clothed us with garments of salvation and righteousness... But at this point, we have to make a decision to be fully committed to Him or not. Will we confess that Christ is Lord, repent of our sin and commit to following Christ as our redeemer and Lord? In closing, have we truly placed ourselves at the feet of our redeemer, demonstrating 100% commitment to him as Ruth did with Boaz? If you have said yes to being committed to the Lord, we receive another gift from Jesus to help maintain this promise –

2 Timothy 2:13 *'If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.'*

2 Timothy 1:7 *'For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.'*

In our human form, we will not be perfect to maintain our commitment all by ourselves; this is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to grant us strength to be self-disciplined. In addition, Jesus himself is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and remain faithful for us; Hallelujah!

5 Be faithfully compliant to the instructions and to the redeemer vs4-5

Ruth demonstrates with her words and her actions that she is compliant and ready to obey. How does she do this? In verse 5 Ruth promises Naomi to obey and do everything she has instructed her. In addition, in verse 4, Naomi says that Ruth must do whatever Boaz asks of her to do. Later in the story, we read that Ruth does both (obey Naomi and Boaz) and provides an example to all Christians to be not just a hearer of the word, but a doer of the word! This is the final step of fellowship with Boaz and the final step for Christians to have a closer and more personal fellowship with Jesus.

John 7:17 *'if we surrender our will, God will be willing and able to teach us!'*(paraphrase)

Boaz has the last word of advice for Ruth, 'wait with Naomi until the matter is settled.' The relationship with God is similar. Accept and obey the command of the redeemer. This relationship is not subjective: 'God shows us what he wants us to do and we'll decide whether or not we want to do it.' No! We should be fully committed and faithfully compliant to our Lord. When this happens listen to what Jesus tells us:

John. 14:21 *'Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.'*

You may disagree with me but it is something I firmly believe. We don't know God by Bible study and church service attendance. What good is it if you know Bible verses, Hebrew or Greek but don't know God? These things give you knowledge about God, but only obedience gives you intimacy and relationship with God. Jesus warns us that only those who are compliant and love him, does He fully reveal himself to them. He's taken the first three steps towards us, but Ruth's words and actions to both Naomi and Boaz was *'all that you say, I will do.'* Are we faithfully compliant to the Lord?

If you have placed your faith in Jesus – he comforts us with the words of Paul

Phillippians 1:6 *'I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.'*

To conclude, Ruth demonstrates with her words and actions that she is compliant and ready to obey. We too should approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us be compliant and ready to obey (**Hebrews 4:16**).

In conclusion this morning, Naomi gave Ruth 5 instructions in order to come closer to Boaz and have a personal relationship with the redeemer. Be freshly washed, be fragrantly anointed, be appropriately clothed, be fully committed and faithfully compliant. As Gergö has taught us, there are invisible elements in the story. We as Christians are washed by the Word of the Lord and cleansed by the blood of Christ. We are anointed with the fragrance of Christ through the Holy spirit. We are clothed in salvation and robes of righteousness. The first three instructions have been fulfilled for us by the Lord so that we, the church, may be presented to Him as a proper bride to the bridegroom. But the last two instructions are about our decision to be fully committed to surrendering our will to sit at the feet of the redeemer – and – to be faithfully compliant to obey the instructions and mission God gives us.

Question: So how does this story end? When these five instructions are complete, what is Boaz's response to Ruth? They are the same responses that Jesus gives to his church:

Ruth 3:8-18

he blessed her v8-10

he received and reassured her v11

he spoke peace to her v12-13

he replenished her v18

Naomi reminded Ruth in Verse 18, that Boaz would not rest until the matter was settled on that same day. Jesus gave his life on the cross and said it is finished – the matter is settled. For those who confess their sins and claim that Jesus is Lord, the matter is settled. You are free. You are a new creation. You are washed, fragrant and well dressed. He (Jesus & HS) helps us remain committed and compliant. In summary, because of Jesus we are able to have a closer relationship to both Him and the Father. Go and share what the Lord has done for you. Hallelujah!

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