

SERIES: BOOK OF RUTH
“The Blessing“
Ruth 4:11-12

One morning R. C. Chapman, a devout Christian, was asked how he was feeling. “I’m burdened this morning!” was his reply. But his happy countenance contradicted his words. So the questioner exclaimed in surprise, “Are you really burdened, Mr. Chapman?” “Yes, but it’s a wonderful burden—it’s an overabundance of blessings for which I cannot find enough time or words to express my gratitude!” Seeing the puzzled look on the face of his friend, Chapman added with a smile, “I am referring to Psalm 68:19 (“Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah” NKJV), which fully describes my condition. In that verse the Father in heaven reminds us that He ‘daily loads us with benefits.’” F. E. Marsh has enumerated some of these blessings:

- An acceptance that can never be questioned. (Eph. 1:6).
- An inheritance that can never be lost (I Peter 1:3–5).
- A deliverance that can never be excelled (2 Cor. 1:10).
- A grace that can never be limited (2 Cor. 12:9).
- A hope that can never be disappointed. (Heb. 6:18, 19).
- A bounty that can never be withdrawn. (1 Col. 3:21–23).
- A joy that need never be diminished (John 15:11).
- A nearness to God that can never be reversed (Eph. 2:13).
- A peace that can never be disturbed (John 14:27).
- A righteousness that can never be tarnished (2 Cor. 5:21).
- A salvation that can never be canceled (Heb. 5:9).¹

God has indeed blessed us in many ways. The hymn *Count Your Blessings*, written by Johnson Oatman, Jr., reminds us to daily count the blessings the Lord sends into our lives. One of those blessings comes through the words of blessing that others speak into our lives.

Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent wrote a book called *The Blessing* in which they build a case for parents, spouses, children, friends, and churches to practice giving “blessings” to one another. The book is also a good biblical study on the subject of *the blessing*. In the book, they mention five elements of a blessing: 1. Meaningful touch; 2. Spoken words; 3. Words that express high value; 4. Words that picture a special future; 5. An active commitment.

Proverbs 28:20a says "**A faithful man will abound with blessings,....**" (NKJV).

That is exactly what we hear happening in our text from the Book of Ruth. In Ruth 4:11-12 we will readily see three of the five elements expressed. Turn there with me.

You will recall that in Ruth 4 Boaz had called together ten elders to witness a legal land and levirate-marriage liquidation sale. A crowd of curious citizens gathered to watch this important court case. [That is not unlike the case that went to the California Supreme Court on Thursday of this week concerning Proposition 8. People started showing up at 4 a.m. in order to get one of the 20 public seats available inside the courtroom. Thousands more gathered outside and around the state watching the court proceedings on large screen TV’s or on computers. After all the dialogue the justices have 90 days to issue a ruling.] By contrast to our system, these citizen-judges were able to make an instant decision and declared their approval of Boaz’ acquiring the property of Elimelech and the person of Ruth as his wife with a hearty “we are witnesses!” But they didn’t stop there. They continued by pouring out an excited, exuberant, and enthusiastic blessing upon this newly recognized couple. Listen. READ RUTH 4:11-12.

¹Galaxie Software. (2002; 2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.

Notice the three elements of a blessing: 1) It used words; 2) Words expressing high value are used; 3) the Words picture a special future. Some versions see this as more than just words spoken about Boaz and Ruth. They see it as a prayer, voiced in Boaz's hearing. A translator's handbook on this passage says: *As in so many instances, an expression beginning with **May the LORD make your wife ... must be introduced in a manner that will show that this is direct discourse addressed to the LORD; for example, "We pray the LORD will make this woman"***² If that is the case we have a fourth element, an active commitment, of the people. Another point of interest is that in the Hebrew text these two verses are beautifully written poetry. It does not translate well or easily into English, so we keep it as statements. Look at the three parts of the blessing: For Ruth, For Boaz, For the new Family unit.

I. THE BLESSING IS FOR RUTH TO BE FRUITFUL. **"May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel;"**

These folks weren't shy about praying/blessing couples with the prospect of lots of children. They were asking the LORD to give Ruth a fertile womb. This was back in the days when children were prized. **"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them...."** (Psalm 127:3-5, NKJV) It seems that there are different sizes of "quivers" and that some "quivers" fill up faster than others. "Ruth was a virtuous woman, and yet needed the prayers of her friends, that by the grace of God she might be made a blessing to the family she had come into." [M.Henry]

Their mentioning **Rachel and Leah** has significance. Rachel, named first, had been barren for many years before she bore children. Similarly Ruth had been barren in Moab.[BKC]

It was important that the Jewish wives bear children, not only to perpetuate the nation, but also because it would be through Israel that God would send the Messiah to earth. The Jews abhorred both abortion and the exposing of children to die—practices that were common in other nations. Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel, bore to him eight sons who "built" the nation by founding the leading tribes of Israel (Gen. 29:31–30:24; 35:18). The use of the word *Ephrathah* in Ruth 4:11 is significant, for the Hebrew word means "fruitful." The people wanted Ruth to be fruitful and famous and bring honor to their little town. It was the place where Rachel was buried (Gen. 35:19), but more importantly, it would be known as the place where Jesus Christ was born.³

"They did not mention her by name but referred to her as "the woman who is coming into your house." The expression "who is coming/about to come to your home" derives from the ancient customary practice of the wedding party proceeding to the home of the groom after the marriage ceremony and him formally ushering the bride into his house. The witnesses' request concerning Ruth is extraordinary inasmuch as they pray that Yahweh would grant this foreign woman a place among the matriarchs of Israel, ... Rachel and Leah. As is well known, Rachel and Leah were the daughters of Laban the Aramean, whom Jacob married and who became the ancestresses of the twelve tribes of Israel. The order of the names, with Rachel before Leah, is striking not only because Leah was the senior and dominant wife but especially because Bethlehem belonged to the tribe of Judah, whose... ancestor was one of Leah's sons.... Just as Rachel and Leah had built up the house of Israel, so, they pray, may Ruth build up the house of Boaz. The idiom "to build a house," which means "to have progeny, descendants, to establish a family," derives from the Mosaic Torah concerning the levirate marriage (Deut 25:9), adding further evidence that Boaz's marriage to Ruth is intended as such".⁴ The blessing was that Ruth would be fertile and fruitful.

²Ward, J. d., & Nida, E. A. (1992). *A translator's handbook on the book of Ruth* (2nd ed.) (71). New York: United Bible Societies.

³Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1993). *Be committed*. An Old Testament study. Ruth and Esther (Ru 4:11). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

⁴Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (721). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

II. THE BLESSING IS FOR BOAZ TO BE FAMOUS. “May you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.” This blessing was for more of what was already true.

The elders prayed that Boaz would **have standing** (חַיִּיל) **in Ephrathah**. This word חַיִּיל (“valor, worth, ability”) is used of Boaz (2:1) and of Ruth (3:11). Ephrathah (also spelled Ephrath and Ephrathah) was another name for **Bethlehem** (cf. Gen. 35:19; 48:7; Micah 5:2). The elders prayed that Boaz would be **famous** in Bethlehem. God abundantly answered their prayers as many have witnessed.[BKC]

The phrase חַיִּיל-אֵשֶׁת (va'aseh-khayil, literally, “do strength”) has been variously translated: (1) **financial prosperity**: “may you become rich” (TEV), “may you be a rich man” (CEV), “may you achieve wealth” (NASB), “may you prosper” (NKJV, NJPS); (2) **social prominence**: “may you become powerful” (NCV), “may you have standing” (NIV), “may you be great” (NLT), “may you do well” (NAB); (3) **reproductive fertility**: “may you produce children” (NRSV); and (4) **social activity**: “may you do a worthy deed” (REB).⁵ This is what is called a “pregnant statement” because so much is conveyed by so few words. Since Boaz was already a man of prominence among them, they wanted that blessing to continue. Obviously he used it wisely and well for the benefit of others and not just his own selfish interests. He was already well-liked and respected and they wanted him to continue doing well. Their blessing was for Boaz to continue being wealthy and famous.

I like the way Matthew Henry summarized the blessings for Ruth and Boaz. He wrote: They desired that the wife might be a blessing in the private affairs of the house, and the husband a blessing in the public business of the town, that she in her place, and he in his, might be wise, virtuous, and successful. Observe, The way to be famous is to do worthily. Great reputation must be obtained by great merits. It is not enough not to do unworthily, to be harmless and inoffensive, but we must do worthily, be useful and serviceable to our generation. Those that would be truly illustrious must in their places shine as lights.⁶

III. THE BLESSING IS FOR THE FAMILY TO BE FOREMOST. “Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman.””

Judah was the father of the tribe of Judah which was given the preeminence, prominence, and position of leadership among the tribes of Israel. Perez was a son of Judah who established himself and his family in Bethlehem. So the blessing was for **numerous and distinguished progeny for Boaz**. ...Little did they realize that from this union would issue Israel’s greatest kings including David and the Eternal King, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Perez** may have been named here: (a) because of the levirate connection with **Tamar** [read about this in Genesis 38... (b) because Perez’s descendants had settled in Bethlehem (1 Chron. 2:5, 18, 50-54; note “Ephrathah” and “Bethlehem” in 1 Chron. 2:50-51), and (c) because Perez was an ancestor of Boaz (Ruth 4:18-21).⁷ Even though Tamar, the mother of Perez, had a tainted past; her name is found in our Lord’s genealogy (Matt. 1:3).

Recognizing Yahweh as the source of blessing and family, they assumed that Boaz’s having offspring through Ruth depended on the divine gift.

Little did those who uttered these words realize how prophetic the words would be. Ten of them were witnesses to this event because they had been summoned; the rest had simply gathered out of curiosity over what was happening in the gate. Now, inspired by the Spirit of God, they joined in a spontaneous

⁵Biblical Studies Press. (2006; 2006). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press.

⁶Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ru 4:9). Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:427). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

and unanimous pronouncement of blessing upon Boaz. They had come to witness, but they left prophesying. Had they been around long enough to see the fulfillment of their prayer, they would have observed the establishment of a name and a house far greater than Perez, the house of King David, a name commemorated to this day in the flag of the state of Israel.⁸

IV. FOUR COMMENTS ABOUT A BLESSING.

1. **If you want people to give a blessing, Do the preliminaries right!** Notice how excited the people were to give this blessing. The excitement came because the preliminaries were done right. Even though it was “love at first sight,” the following months of “courtship” had been done correctly. Even though her visit to the threshing floor was discreet, forward, and bold, it was not tainted with impropriety. The text continually presents them as two people of highest integrity, honesty, and morality. In other words, they played by the rules. When it came time for them to get married people could happily and readily enter into the occasion and give a blessing to the union. A strong word here to you older children: in your dating and developing of relationships, **do it right!** If you are a follower of Jesus, don't get very involved with non-believers; keep yourself morally clean by avoiding sex, drugs, and those who want to do those things; develop yourself to your full potential; apply yourself to your education and skill development; hang out with people of like mind; make friends of those who inspire you to become better than you are. **Do it right**, so when the time comes, we who have witnessed your life can enthusiastically give you our blessing!

2. **If stable HAPPINESS AFTER MARRIAGE be desired, care should be taken to have all preliminaries duly, clearly, and righteously pre-arranged, more particularly such as have reference to possessions, money, rights, or prerogatives. There should be also, especially in these modern times, distinct preliminary arrangements regarding the chief manners and customs of the home.**⁹ That's the way a pastor in a previous century said it. I put it this way: **the more you do right before marriage the more you enjoy the blessings later.** This means you do all you can to get as prepared for marriage as possible. Try to remove as many surprises as possible. Talk about everything before marriage in order to have a happier after marriage. Boaz and Ruth took care of as much as possible as they could before they got married, so that their marriage could be as trouble-free as possible after the wedding. Then, continue talking about everything all the way through your lives together.

3. **When you witness a major event in someone's life, Be ready to add your blessing when it is appropriate.** I think the corollary is also true, withhold your blessing when it is not appropriate to give it. A blessing is an important and powerful thing. Do not dispense it too casually or just because you feel social pressure to do so. But when it is the right thing, give your blessings with gusto! [The Kiss]

4. **It is always exciting to see the results of such a blessing.** With Boaz and Ruth it didn't take too long before the news was announced: Ruth is pregnant! How long do you think it took that word to get around that community? Later in the chapter we read how excited the women folk were. We have the added privilege of seeing the blessing fully accomplished in Jesus. As believers in Jesus we stand under the umbrella of this blessing. By faith in the Lord Jesus we can claim Boaz and Ruth as part of our spiritual blessings. Amen.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14, NASB95)

⁸Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (721). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹*The Pulpit Commentary: Ruth*. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (66). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

An Alternative Opening to The Blessing

The hymn *Count Your Blessings*, written by Johnson Oatman, Jr., reminds us to daily count the blessings the Lord sends into our lives. One of those blessings comes through the words of blessing that others speak into our lives. Other cultures have done a much better job of that than we have. The Jews, Irish, and others have blessings for all kinds of events and happenings in life. For instance, in the movie of Louis L'Amour's *Crossfire Trail*, starring Tom Selleck there is a scene of three friends riding their horses through some breath-takingly beautiful country. They come to a junction in the trail and two of them are going off to Wyoming, and the third, a big, strong, Irish lad is heading for Montana. As they stop on a knoll overlooking a gorgeous valley with a river running through it to express farewells, it is the Irishman's blessing that catches your attention. From the back of a horse, with majestic mountains in the background, and emotion in his voice he gives a traditional Irish blessing:

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back
May the sun shine warm upon your face
And the rain fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.
*Author unknown, Irish blessing*¹⁰

Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent wrote a book....

There are a variety of ways to pass on a blessing.

The Kiss

At age 16 Andor Foldes was already a skilled pianist, but he was experiencing a troubled year. In the midst of the young Hungarian's personal struggles, one of the most renowned pianists of the day came to Budapest. Emil von Sauer was famous not only for his abilities; he was also the last surviving pupil of the great Franz Liszt. Von Sauer requested that Foldes play for him. Foldes obliged with some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann. When he finished, von Sauer walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead. "My son," he said, "when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, 'Take good care of this kiss—it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play. ' I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it.'"¹¹ The implication is that Foldes would pass it on also.

¹⁰Water, M. (2000). *The new encyclopedia of Christian quotations* (141). Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd.

¹¹Galaxie Software. (2002; 2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.