

Rich and Poor In the Book of Ruth

1. Introduction.
 - A. Read – **Ruth 2:1-3 - Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” ³So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. [slide 1]**
 - B. Ruth Topics.
 - (1). Bret – God’s sovereignty and our responsibility.
 - (2). Then we talked about God’s providence – his participation with his creation.
 - (3). Last week Bret spoke about character, our responsibility within God’s sovereignty and providence, how do we live?
 - (4). Today we want to look at an example of the character and responsibility shown in the book of Ruth, by Ruth and Boaz, in the area of being rich or being poor.
 - (5). Disclaimer - Had decided to do this topic before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, have some examples from our own news.
2. First – Economic Status of Rich and Poor by Ruth and Boaz.
 - A. Poor – Ruth – come back from Moab with Naomi. They appear to have nothing. Passage we just read, Ruth is going out to glean wherever she can.
 - B. Rich – Boaz – he is a man of standing in Bethlehem. He comes out to one of his fields and converses with harvesters and the foreman of his harvesters. He has servant girls working in the fields. He offers water to Ruth and bread and roasted grain for lunch. Later on we find out he has the means to redeem a field Naomi is selling.
3. Relationship between the rich and poor and the interaction between Ruth and Boaz, we had covered previously in two parts of the law.
 - A. First part was how to take care of the poor in Israel.
 - (1). **Leviticus 19:9-10 - When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God. [slide 2]**
 - (2). This is repeated in Lev. 23:22.

- (3). Adrian read earlier: **Deuteronomy 24:19-22 - When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. ²¹When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. ²²Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this. [slide 2]**
- a. We see Ruth and Naomi are widows. Ruth also is an alien, a Moabitess in Israel. The first time she meets Boaz and he offers for her to glean in his fields and to drink from his water jars, she bows her face to the ground, a humble stature recognizing she is a foreigner in his field.
 - b. The perspective God gives in his law here is from what the Israelites were before they came to Israel. They were slaves in Egypt. The reason they have fields, olive trees, and vineyards is because God gave them to the Israelites when he brought them to the Promised Land.
- B. Second part of the law that fits this relationship between rich Boaz and poor Naomi and Ruth is the law related to being a kinsman-redeemer.
- (1). Discussed previously that kinsman-redeemer is there to provide an heir when a brother dies. He might also be called on to avenge a killing of a relative.
 - (2). But here we also said that the kinsman-redeemer can redeem property that a relative sold outside the family. **Leviticus 25:23-25 - The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. ²⁴Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. ²⁵If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. [slide 3]**
 - a. Who owns the land? Not the Israelites, but God. God's providence is that he is involved with his creation, including ownership of it all.
 - b. Redemption - responsibility of kinsman-redeemer.
 - (3). Kinsman-redeemer redeems relatives that have sold themselves into slavery. **Leviticus 25:47-49 - If an alien or**

a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan, ⁴⁸he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: ⁴⁹An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.

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a. The relationship between the rich and poor in Israel is redemption. Why? Because God is redemptive.

(4). God's view of rich and poor in Israel. **Deuteronomy 15:4 - However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, ... [slide 4]**

a. We see God's promise of blessing, but as we continue reading, we see conditions. **Deuteronomy 15:5 - if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. [slide 4]**

b. Under the theocracy of God, Israel had an inheritance with God. But they just like you or I reject God's being in charge, we don't follow his commands, and we see the results day in and day out, including in our economy. So there doesn't have to be poor in Israel, but there are, and God instructs them how to take care of the poor.

c. **Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10 - If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD you God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.... ¹⁰Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. [slide 5]** Again we see God's blessing as the rich bless the poor.

4. What happens if the rich don't bless the poor, as God's law directs?

A. **Amos 2:6-7 - This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ⁷ They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed." [slide 6]**

B. **Ezekiel 22:29, 31 - The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and**

mistreat the alien, denying them justice. ³⁰I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. ³¹So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.

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- C. **Zechariah 7:9-11, 14 - This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰ Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' ¹¹But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears... ¹⁴ I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate. [slide 7]**
 - D. The result of being under God's government is to live like God. God is redemptive and just to the widow, the fatherless, the alien, and the poor. His people were to be also. But when they rejected God's government, he rejected them and scattered them among the nations.
 - E. But we see in Ruth the example of God's law and blessing applied by Boaz toward Ruth and Naomi.
5. Now let's look at our society's views of the rich and poor:
- A. Perceptions of the rich.
 - (1). They are getting richer at the expense of the poor.
 - a. Ex. Building of sports stadiums, owners want the local people to pay for it. Then I have to pay for the food inside.
 - b. Gasoline prices – they went flying couple of weeks ago, was it for a real problem or an opportunity for oil moguls to make money?
 - c. Internationally - oil for food scandal at the United Nations. Look at Saddam Hussein's luxurious palaces while Iraqi people were poor.
 - (2). The justice system is different for the rich than for the poor.
 - a. There's an American gentleman, Marc Rich who engaged in illegal oil deals with Iran, fled to Switzerland as an international billionaire. He had been sentenced to 325 years in prison. But he was pardoned a few years ago. The pardon may have come because of his various donations to appropriate political entities.
 - (3). The rich try to exploit the poor for their own purposes.

- a. The abortion issue – Margaret Sanger, the founder of what is now known as Planned Parenthood: Her first handbook, published for adolescents in 1915 and entitled, *What Every Boy and Girl Should Know*, featured a jarring afterword:
It is a vicious cycle; ignorance breeds poverty and poverty breeds ignorance. There is only one cure for both, and that is to stoop breeding these things. Stop bringing to birth children whose inheritance cannot be one of health or intelligence. Stop bringing into the world children whose parents cannot provide for them. [slide 8]
 - b. Her solution saw abortion, as a way to reduce the population of what they believed was "socially undesirables": the poor, the unborn, the sick, the old, and the wrong race. Another term for this - eugenics, what the Nazis were doing with their gas chambers.
 - c. Roe vs. Wade - Nora McCorvey – Jane Roe of Roe vs. Wade – was a 21 year old woman with a 10th grade education; too poor to get an illegal abortion in Texas, or a legal one in California. She was poor, uneducated, unskilled, an alcoholic, and using drugs, had already given up two children for adoption and now, in 1970, found herself pregnant again.
- B. Perceptions of the poor.
- (1). They are lazy, go down to D.C. and see people asking for money.
 - (2). They are trying to take other people's property, ex. pictures of looting in New Orleans; people hiding from the cameras, they know they are doing wrong.
 - (3). They are always looking the government to take care of them, ex. welfare, the Katrina situation.
6. Are those perceptions redemptive? See views from the book of Ruth.
- A. Boaz is rich and blesses the poor, the alien, and the widows.
- (1). He is a steward of what God has given him. You and I are stewards of what God has given us. There are good and bad stewards.
 - a. Ex. Luke 12 about the rich man who was concerned about having bigger barns, to eat drink and be merry. God said – You fool, tonight your soul will be required of you. Is God in charge of the rich? God is sovereign over all, including their economic status.
 - b. Another one who was wealthy in the OT was Nabal (which meant fool) in I Samuel 25. David sent some men to him to ask for food. Nabal said why should I

give my food and water to these people. David was going to kill him and all the males in his household. But God took care of Nabal and within 10 days he was dead.

- c. This is in contrast to Barzillai who in II Samuel 17:28-29 brought bedding and bowls and pottery, wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and cheese for David and his men to eat as they were fleeing from Absalom. II Samuel 19 says that Barzillai had provided for the king, for he was very wealthy. He used what was given as a good steward.
 - d. Stewardship is not based on having lots to give: front of the bulletin, Mark 12:41-44, Jesus watching the crowd put money in the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Jesus said that this woman put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.
- (2). Stewardship is not announcing to the crowd what we are doing.
- a. Katrina buses from D.C. Mission to bring people back, brought back one. Was it a photo op?
 - b. **Matthew 6:2-4 So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. [slide 9]**
- (3). Not all of us are in the same economic status. We have to be stewards of what we have.
- a. I woke up today and discovered I was still not Bill Gates. Tomorrow I have to trek downtown to work behind the computer again. Matt. 25:14-30 talks about a man who is going on a journey and calls his servants. To one he gives five talents of money, to another two talents, and to the third one talent. After a long time he comes back, and he settles the accounts with each one. The first two gained 100%, the last one just hid the money and didn't do anything

with it. We use what God has given us to provide for us and also to be his stewards.

- b. Boaz was a steward of his property. He was out in the fields finding out what was going on. He was at the threshing floor to take care of his grain.

B. Ruth portrays the poor in a redemptive way. She is a steady worker, gleaning from morning to evening; then threshing the grain and taking it back to Naomi.

(1). We have to be careful about how we view the poor. Proverbs gives a number of reasons for why people could be poor:

- a. **Proverbs 10:4 – Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. [slide 10]**
- b. **Proverbs 20:13 – Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare. [slide 10]**
- c. **Proverbs 21:17 – He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich. [slide 10]**

(2). But there might be legitimate reason why they are poor.

- a. Ruth – part of God’s involvement with his creation to bring Ruth and Naomi back to Bethlehem to add to the genealogy leading to King David and eventually to Jesus.
- b. Remember Job – Satan said the only reason Job feared God was because God protected him and everything he had. So God permitted Satan to take everything away from Job, including his good health.

(3). Since we may not know why a person is in a poor or needy place, we make ourselves available to be a steward to them.

Proverbs 19:17 – He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.

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C. The contrast that I have given doesn’t necessarily have what we might consider to be a middle-class. I am not independently wealthy; I still have monthly house and car payments. At the same time, I have a roof over my head, I can eat out now and then, and 99.99% of the time my checks don’t bounce unless I have made a mistake in the checkbook, so I’m not poor. What is the redemptive way to walk in a middle-class status?

(1). I have to work. And since I am not independently wealthy, I have to be careful not to covet or steal from those whom I feel have more than enough.

- a. **Exodus 20:15 – You shall not steal. [slide 12]** I have to be careful even in the smallest of circumstances. If we go out to eat and I notice they

forgot something on the bill, couple nights ago it was one ginger ale. Do I tell them even though it will cost me?

- b. **Exodus 20:17 – You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. [slide 12]** There are some nice houses in our neighborhood. And instead of the ox or donkey, it might be the type of car my neighbor has. People also have all sorts of cool stereo systems, bigger fishing boats, or new furniture. Instead, I am thankful to a sovereign God who has blessed me with all things in Christ Jesus, and who is actively involved in my life for his glory.

- (2). Our prayer might be: **Proverbs 30:7-9 - Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹ Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. [slide 12]**

- 7. With God’s sovereignty and providence, you and I have responsibility. Part of that responsibility is to have godly character, the word used over and over was **hesed**. Whether rich or poor, God shows that covenantal kindness to us and is working in us to demonstrate that kindness to others.
 - A. We see it in Boaz as he demonstrates **hesed** in the position of having wealth. He not only blesses in word, but he blesses in his works.
 - B. We see it in Ruth the Moabitess. She shows hesed to Naomi by leaving her homeland of Moab to come to Bethlehem. She comes as an alien/foreigner and as a poor widow with Naomi. All she has is the strength to serve by getting up and gleaning in the fields. She is thankful for all she gets, but is not demanding on anything the law might offer her. Not only is her character talked about in the marketplace, but it is seen by all of her other actions.
- 8. Benediction – **Phil 4:12-13 - I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**