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THREAD: Meditations on marriage metaphors in Ruth

The book of Ruth is, of course, a story about a beautiful marriage. But even before the courtship and the wedding and the important genealogy at the end, we find interesting language that is strikingly reminiscent of Genesis 2:24

That important verse reads:

'Therefore a man shall leave [■■■■■■■■■] his father and his mother and hold fast [■■■■■■■■■] to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.'

The verb ■■■ can be quite strong in force. For example, Joseph leaves behind [■■■■■■■■■■■■] his garment as he flees from Pharaoh's wife's sexual advances. Countless times, Israel is depicted abandoning the LORD, for example in Judg 2:12 [■■■■■■■■■■■■■■], and going after other gods.

Likewise, the verb ■■■ is rather striking. Lot is mortified of disaster overtaking him [■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■] as he flees from Sodom. Israel is commanded in Deut 10:20 to cling fast [■■■■■■■■■■] to the LORD and serve him and swear by his name.

Together they illustrate how radical God designed marriage to be. Marriage is a real severing of family relations in order to form a new, permanent bond with another human being.

Something very similar to this takes places in Ruth's life.

When returning to Israel destitute, Naomi encouraged both of her daughters to go back to their people and their gods. In response, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye...but Ruth clung to her [■■■■■■■■■■].

What is more, she made it clear just what she was clinging to.

'Do not urge me to leave you [■■■■■■■■■■■■] or to return 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.' (Ruth 1:16)

Later, Boaz makes explicit just what Ruth has done in clinging to Naomi:

'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband...how you left [■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■] your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.'

Likewise he makes clear the full entailment of Ruth's actions:

'The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!' (Ruth 2:12)

It is the God of Israel that Ruth is clinging to, and seeking refuge under his wings.

In Ezekiel 16, Israel is depicted as a naked maiden, abhorred and abandoned. Nevertheless, the LORD took her as his own.

The LORD states: 'When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and l spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine.'

Of course, Ruth comes with a very similar request to Boaz later in our story. In a stunning statement, she says to him: 'I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.' (Ruth 3:9)

The concept of being covered by someone's wings is a bit foreign to us, but we can readily conceive of marriage a kind of secure environment where intimacy is cultivated and shame is banished.

Indeed, when we return back to Genesis 2, we find that the very next verse explicitly states that the man and his wife were both naked, yet they were not ashamed.

The Lord Jesus is repeatedly depicted as the bridegroom of his church. Thus Paul:

'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.'

Christ also forsook heaven and came to earth, taking the form of a servant, being made like his brethren so that he could bind himself to them in covenant and take their burdens upon himself. Bearing the shame, he dyed naked on an accursed tree.

The Reformer Martin Luther was very fond of the marriage metaphor, and he uses it in such a profound way in his treatise 'On the Freedom of the Christian' (1520). These words are perhaps my favourite outside of Scripture:

'The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation...

...Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his...

... If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?'

The power of love is compared to the power of death in the Song of Solomon (8:6–7)

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.'

'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.'

So, too, we see the fierceness with which Ruth clings to the God of Israel: 'May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.' (Ruth 1:17)

I close with the final words of celebrated polymath Blaise Pascal. This note was found in his coat pocket after his death:

'Year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement...from about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, FIRE...

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God...Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy...Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ.

May I never be ■■■■■■■■ from him.'