

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SEVENTY-SIX: RUTH 4:17

"And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David."

The women of Bethlehem continue to rejoice with Naomi on the birth of Boaz and Ruth's son. They were excited that the heritage of Naomi's family had been restored through the birth of an heir. The Hebrew word translated "son" can also be translated "grandson" or "nephew." It indicates a male relative. In this instance "grandson" would be more accurate. Obed was, in effect, the son of Naomi's son Mahlon through Mahlon's widow Ruth.

In Ruth 1:21, Naomi had complained when she returned to Bethlehem that she had gone out "full" (i.e. with one husband and two sons) and had come back "empty" (discounting her daughter-in-law). Now she rejoiced as her fullness returned in the form of a grandson, daughter-in-law and Kinsman-Redeemer. She lost a family when she sojourned in Moab. She regained a family when she returned to Israel.

The women of the town named the infant "Obed." Interesting that the townspeople got to name the baby instead of his parents. How did that work exactly? Did the ladies brainstorm baby names and then vote on the favorites? Maybe Ruth had several names in mind and asked her neighbors for their opinions. The consensus fell on "Obed." The process was not important enough for us to know since God did not inspire it to be recorded for us. The result is what counts.

"Obed" means "servant." Why did the women of Bethlehem think it was a good idea to call the baby "servant?" The son of one of the town's rich landowners was named "servant." The much desired heir of Elimelech's family was designated "servant." The child who was destined to be a progenitor of kings and the Lord Jesus was named "servant."

By worldly wisdom this name would be an insult, demeaning to the heir of wealthy parents. A servant was not held in high regard. No parent says, "I hope my son will grow up to be a servant some day." The world honors leaders, those who give orders, not servants who take orders.

But Jesus brought a new kind of wisdom into the world: spiritual wisdom. He turned everything upside down. In Jesus' world the role of "servant" was desirable (Mark 10:43-44). Jesus Himself was an example of a life of service (Mark 10:45). He was God come in the flesh and He chose to come in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-8). He commanded His followers to serve one another (John 13:12-17).

Are you a servant of Jesus Christ? I have often heard Christians refer to themselves as the children of God the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of the King, co-heirs with Christ, etc. And, even when we do refer to ourselves as servants, we are the servants of Jesus. We're not likely to call ourselves the servants of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Yes, we're here to serve one another (we prefer the terms "help" and "assist" to "serve"), but we aren't keen on the job title "servant." It sounds so lowly, so humble. I think that's the point. Satan's sin was pride. Jesus' characteristic was humility. Is your life one of service?

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and give grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." I Peter 5:5-6