

Ruth
The Redeemer (Part 1)

Ruth 4:1-22

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Well, with tonight's message, and one other one coming in early May, sadly, for me, we will come to the end of our wonderful journey through the ancient story of a Moabite widow by the name of Ruth. The drama that was her life is told in the book that bears her name and unfolds in a series, really, of five great acts. Let me remind you of where we've been so far in this wonderful book.

We called the First Act *The Far Country*. The Far Country. In 1:1 - 5, we learned that Ruth's story unfolded during the dark period of the judges. It began during a desperate famine. And it began with the disastrous choice of the Hebrew family of a man named Elimelech, which ironically means "my God is king." Elimelech, with the apparent agreement of his wife Naomi, decided to move his family from Israel to Moab, a land of Israel's enemies, a land filled with the idolatrous worship of Chemosh, the false god of the Moabites, who even demanded child sacrifice. Verses 3 - 5 then document for us the divine consequences of their rebellion. Within a ten-year period, as a result of the parents' sinful decision to move from Israel to a pagan land, Elimelech, Naomi's then very young husband, died unexpectedly. It wasn't too long until their boys married idolatrous Moabite women. And both of Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Chilion, were married for ten years without children. At the end of that ten-year period, both of those boys died suddenly and prematurely. In the far country, this Hebrew family experienced God's chastening hand.

So, Naomi decides to return from the far country, and -Act Two we called *The Journey Home*. It's really the rest of chapter 1. Beginning in verse 6, this act details the remarkable story of Naomi's repentance and her spiritual restoration to God, to Yahweh, and it also details Ruth in her conversion. The focus of these verses, however, is not Ruth. It's not Naomi. It's Yahweh. Yahweh shows Himself in this second half of chapter 1 to be a Savior in several ways. He is a Savior temporally by restoring Israel from drought and famine to food, and Naomi hears about it

and decides to return. He's a Savior by restoring Naomi from sin and rebellion to repentance and to walking in His ways. And He shows Himself to be a Savior by converting Ruth from idolatry to a worshiper of the true God.

That brings us to Act Three. It begins in verse 22 of chapter 1 and runs all the way through the second chapter. And I entitled Act Three *Yahweh's Protection and Provision*. Boaz makes the point in chapter 2 that these women had sought refuge in Yahweh under His wings. Naomi had repented and returned to her God. Ruth the Moabitess, who had been idolater her entire life, now believed in Yahweh, Israel's God. And since they were now seeking their refuge in Him, Yahweh assumed complete responsibility for their care. And He does so by bringing Ruth to glean in the field of Naomi's relative, Boaz because God has a plan.

That brings us to Act Four and what I entitled *A Bold Proposal*. This is chapter 3. In this chapter Naomi creates an extraordinary plan. Naomi tells Ruth that she is going to propose marriage to Boaz. Although it seems to any reader very unlikely to succeed, still, it was a biblical plan. You see, it was based on an obscure Old Testament passage about levitate marriage. In other words, Naomi had decided that however radical it may be, she and Ruth were going to follow the biblical directions for how God had said they were to be cared for in Israel at that time. It was a biblical plan, a bold plan, but it was also a wise plan. We learn in the second half of chapter 3 that Naomi had not only pursued a plan that followed the Scripture, but she had carefully crafted that plan to fit her own circumstances and her own culture. She lays the plan out to Ruth, and Ruth followed Naomi's plan to a tee.

And that night at midnight at the threshing floor of Boaz, she proposes to Boaz. And Boaz responded to her proposal by pronouncing a blessing on her, by accepting her proposal of marriage. Look at 3:11. "Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you [what you have asked or] whatever you ask." He was accepting her proposal of marriage. "For all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence."

But he also pointed out to her there was serious problem with hers and Naomi's plan. Verse 12, "Now ... [it's] true [that] I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I." This is

a big problem. There is a kinsman-redeemer (the Hebrew word “goel,” a relative responsible to take care of them) who is closer to them in the line of the family than he is. Still, in verses 13 - 15 of chapter 3, he reassures Ruth about her future. Notice verse 13, “Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you.” And he chose as his seriousness and how much he wants to do this, because he makes an oath in the most solemn way a Hebrew could. “As the Lord lives.” As Yahweh lives. So “lie down until morning.”

When Ruth returns to Bethlehem early the next morning before light truly breaks, Naomi asks for a report. And when Ruth gives it, Naomi rested her future (and she urged Ruth to rest her future as well) not primarily on Boaz’ integrity, although she does that, but on God’s providence. You see, the point in chapter 3 is that in His providence, God uses wise plans carried out in obedience to His Word to provide for those who seek refuge in Him. When we stop our rebellion, and when we turn to the Lord, when we stop our sinful scheming to work out our circumstances, and instead we seek to make wise plans that reflect God’s Word and God’s will and then entrust ourselves to Him, God takes care of us. That brings us up to date to where we are so far.

Tonight, we come to the beginning of the end of this magnificent, dramatic story. I’ve entitled the fifth and final act *The Redeemer, The Redeemer*. And as you might guess, there is a bit of a double meaning in that expression, because there’s more than one redeemer in this passage. In fact, as we will learn, there are several. Let’s look at it together. Ruth 4, and I’ll read a portion of it.

Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, [this is early the next morning] and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. Then he said to the closest relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. So, I thought to inform you, saying, “Buy it before those who are sitting *here*, and

before the elders of my people. If you will redeem *it*, redeem *it*; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I ... after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.” Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” The closest relative said, “[Well] I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem *it* for yourself; you *may have* my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem *it*.”

Now this was *the custom* in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange *of land* to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was *the manner* of attestation in Israel. So, the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy *it* for yourself.” And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his *birth* place; you are witnesses today.” All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “*We are* witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. 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.”

In this act Yahweh provides a redeemer for His people. At a temporal level, God rescues His people from the troubles and difficulties that had come into their lives that are described in this book. And He does so in His time, in His will, and according to His way. But also, in chapter 4, He reminds us of the spiritual and eternal way God rescues His people. And He always does so through the one Redeemer He has appointed, the ultimate descendant of Boaz and Ruth, His Son,

Jesus the Messiah. Chapter 4, then, as we will discover, is really a riveting and rich story of redemption, not at one level, but at many different levels.

So, let's look tonight, first of all, we need to learn that it is a story of a Redeemer for Ruth. We see this in the twelve verses that I've just read for you. The scene described in these 12 verses of chapter 4 completely unfolds at the city gate of Bethlehem. The author begins by giving us the setting. It is a legal setting that we see in the first two verses. Notice verse 1. "Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there." Boaz here immediately makes good on his midnight promise that he's going to settle the matter that day.

So, he left the threshing floor and he "went up," the Scripture says, to Bethlehem. That's because ancient cities were always built at the very highest point, so anywhere you went from the city itself was down. And everywhere else, including the threshing floor, was up to the city. Because of defensive purposes they were always at that high point. And it says here he "went up to the gate and sat down." Normally, men coming from the fields would pass through the city gates and continue to their homes.

But Boaz has no time to lose. He has no time to return home. Instead, the author says, he went directly to "the gate." Now, here's one of those cultural bridges we have to build, because that really means very little to us, almost nothing, because it's so out of our cultural experience.

Let's start by getting a better idea of what the Bethlehem gate was like by looking at the excavations of the ancient gate of the Canaanite town of Gezer. The gate complex that was discovered there at Gezer was built in the time of Solomon, so it was only a hundred or two hundred years after our story unfolds in Ruth.

Now if you examine the ruins at Gezer and the gate complex (and it was a complex), you discover that there was, first of all, a passageway into the city that was about 13' wide. And off of that center passageway on each side there were three rooms or meeting areas. These meeting rooms were each about 7' by 14'. This was the community center of sorts. On all three walls of those rooms there were stone benches (that they can tell at the time had been smoothed with

plaster) benches all around the edges on which those who were there for the meeting could sit. Now Bethlehem was smaller than the city of Gezer, so its gate was probably smaller as well. But it would have been on a similar plan to that ancient gate.

So, understand, then, that the ancient city gates in Israel not only controlled access into the city, but they also served as a kind of formal gathering place for the citizens of the community. They were a kind of town hall. The city gate was the place to conduct official business, to resolve legal matters. So, when the text says that Boaz went to the gate, that was the ancient equivalent of saying he went to court, or he went to town hall. And once he arrived, the author says he sat down. Boaz was clearly not there that morning to catch up on the town's gossip; instead, he was there to conduct official, legal business.

Now, it's easy with a merely superficial reading of the Scripture to miss the significance of the next line in the story. Look at verse 1. "And behold." The Hebrew word there is a word that intends to catch your attention. Think about this! Be amazed at this! "The close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by." Now at first glance, this seems like a simple coincidence. But as we have learned again and again in this short book, there are no accidents. There is a sovereign God controlling the seemingly most insignificant details. And here again the sovereign hand of God is at work in the lives of these people, just as He is in ours. Boaz just happened to arrive at the city gate just in time to just happen to catch the kinsman-redeemer leaving the city for his fields and his day's work.

But just as is true with Ruth's chance chancing upon the field belonging to Boaz—You remember that expression in chapter 2? Ruth, her chance chanced upon the field belonging to Boaz, it says in the Hebrew text. Just as that was no accident, behind this apparent coincidence is the hidden hand of God. Daniel Block writes, "Yahweh insures the quick resolution of the matter by sending him by the gate just as Boaz was sitting down."

Verse 1 continues. So, Boaz says, "'Turn aside, friend, sit down here.' And He turned aside and sat down." Most modern translations like the *NAS* have Boaz referring to this man as "friend". But that's not precisely the idea of the Hebrew expression. This expression is used only two

other times in the Old Testament (in 1 Samuel 21:2 and 2 Kings 6:8) where it's used of places that are not named, and we're not told what the names are. In those places it's translated "in a certain place" or "in such and such a place." That's really the idea here. That's why one version of Ruth translates Boaz' words to this man as "ho, mister so and so." Perhaps a better way to express it in colloquial English is "hey buddy, hey man."

Now, it's interesting to consider why the author of Ruth left this man anonymous when he includes the names of the other actors. We can't be certain. But it seems to me that in the same way that Boaz becomes famous forever because of his selfless actions in this story, this man becomes anonymous forever because of his selfish actions. Regardless, Boaz asks this anonymous relative to join him and the man does.

Verse 2, ... in addition, "He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, 'Sit down here.' So they sat down." The two key characters in this scene were already present, but for Boaz to conduct official, legal business, he first had to have a quorum of ten witnesses who were citizens of the town of Bethlehem. In addition, (notice) they're identified as "elders of the city." These were men of age and influence who were qualified to conduct business and to witness the town's business affairs. Because of his own stature in the community, Boaz has no problem getting these ten men, who undoubtedly had other business to attend to as well, to come and witness this legal transaction. They sat on the benches in one of those rooms at the gate, or if the rooms were too small to hold 12 men, undoubtedly, they met in the open market just inside the gate. That's the legal setting for what transpires.

Now what comes next can really only best be called the court transcript. Verses 3 through the first part of verse 11 essentially read like our modern court transcripts. Here is what happened that day as the court of Bethlehem was in session. Verse 3, "Then he said to the closest relative, 'Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.'" In the Hebrew text Boaz actually begins with the piece of land. He says, literally, "The portion of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech, Naomi, who returned from the field of Moab, is selling." Now, that expression "the portion of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech" points back to the time of Joshua. It points back to the fact that in

Joshua's time, God Himself had apportioned the land of Palestine to various tribes and clans in Israel. And those allotments, according to the Law of Moses, were never to leave the family to which God had assigned them. In fact, one of the reasons for the goel or the kinsman-redeemer, the reason he existed, was to make sure that didn't happen, according to Leviticus 25:25 - 30.

Now Boaz refers to the land (notice) as belonging "to our brother." It's really impossible to determine exactly how these men were related to Elimelech. We do know there was a sort of pecking order in how property was passed down. According to Numbers 27:8 - 11, there was a specific order of relatives in which property was to be legally passed down in Israel. It started, as you might expect, with the man's son. But if he had no son (this is interesting) it was to be passed to his daughter. And if he had no children at all, then it was to be passed to his brothers. And if he had neither children nor brothers, his inheritance passed to his paternal uncles, his uncles on his father's side. If he had none of those relatives, then the property passed to the closest relative from his clan. That was the order of inheritance. Although we can't be sure, it is possible, I think even likely, that the law of levirate marriage followed the same basic order. But we don't know where these men were in that sort of pecking order of inheritance. All we know for sure (according to 2:1) is that Boaz was from the family or the clan of Elimelech. And since this other man is a closer relative, he also had to have been from the clan of Elimelech.

So, Boaz finished his opening statement by explaining what had precipitated the meeting that day. Notice, Naomi is selling. Now, that statement seems pretty straightforward, but it's not quite as straightforward as it seems. There are actually two possibilities of what Naomi was doing here with her husband's land. The first option was that as the widow of the owner of the land, it was possible that Naomi actually had the legal right to permanently transfer ownership of the land as long as it was within her own clan. Remember, the land wasn't to leave the clan. In most cases in the Old Testament, the word translated here "sell" refers to the actual sale of property. So that's possible here. But there's one complication that makes that questionable, and that is, typically, a widow had no right to own the land or to sell it. That's what made a widow's circumstances so difficult. Another possibility of what this means is that Naomi was not selling the land in the truest sense (permanently transferring ownership), but rather she was transferring the legal right to the use of the land and to its produce until (you remember) the Year of Jubilee,

when the land and its use reverted to the original owner. It's recorded in Leviticus 25:23 - 28, and Leviticus 27:20 - 24.

But regardless, Naomi has to give up the rights to her husband's land. And since that's true, since that's true, Boaz says in verse 4, "So I thought to inform you [I thought to make it clear to you] saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" Boaz directly challenges this man in front of witnesses to be the goel and to redeem the land of Elimelech. But if he was unwilling to do so, Boaz would take on the responsibility as the next closest relative in line. Now, I am sure that if Ruth was present that morning at these proceedings, perhaps hanging around in the gate area listening, wondering what would happen, I'm sure her heart sank as she heard this man's response in verse 4. Just two Hebrew words. It's translated for us: "And he said, 'I will redeem.'" I will redeem.

Now, it's possible that Boaz had anticipated this response and had waited until now, strategically, to bring up a very serious complication. Verse 5, then Boaz said, OK, fine. You want to do that? I forgot to mention one thing. "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." Boaz says listen, I need to let you know that the circumstances are more complicated than I initially explained to you. On the same day that you purchase the land from Naomi, you will be responsible for Elimelech's line and for making sure it continues. And since Naomi, his widow, was elderly and past child-bearing age, that wasn't going to happen. And so, it meant, very practically, that this man must then marry Elimelech's daughter-in-law and father a child through her, Ruth, for the sake of both Elimelech and Mahlon, Ruth's dead husband. When Boaz says that you must do so "in order to [notice what he says] to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance," what he meant was, to establish their memory and honor into the future by ensuring that there were descendants.

On a humorous note [and you know, there're so many places in the Scripture where you just find yourself smiling.] This is one of them. I mean, first of all, the way he waits. I love that. There's this great piece of land. You're going to want to buy it. OK, I'll buy it. Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention one thing, one little, insignificant detail. It also brings marriage with it. But

then, notice how he says it. You almost have to think that Boaz intentionally, as he describes Ruth and the necessity of marrying her, he sort of intentionally throws in “the Moabitess” to make her just a little less attractive to this man. She’s not even Jewish. She’s a foreigner.

Now the next verse makes it clear that this new complication has seriously affected this man’s interest in the land. Verse 6, “The closest relative said, ‘I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance.’” Now what does he mean here? Well think about this. First of all, if he were to marry Ruth and to have another child, a son, then that son would get all of Elimelech’s inheritance. So, he would gain nothing from the marriage. He wouldn’t gain the land. He wouldn’t gain any financial advantage. The son, the new heir, would get all of Elimelech’s property. In addition, he would also have to give a portion of his own family inheritance to this new heir.

So, this isn’t looking like a very good deal. In addition to the cost of the land, in addition to the potential loss of inheritance, he’s also going to have the cost of providing for both Naomi and Ruth. This land deal is becoming quickly very expensive. So, verse 6, he says, “Redeem it for yourself; you *may have* my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem *it*.”

Now, whoever wrote the Book of Ruth (and we can’t be certain of that) wrote long enough after the events that are described here that he has to interrupt the story to explain a custom that was no longer practiced in his time. Look at verse 7. “Now this was *the custom* in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the *matter of* attestation in Israel.” You know this, but the primary footwear in the ancient world, they wore sandals made from leather secured with straps or laces. And as the sign of a legal transfer of property or rights, there was a custom in Israel to remove one of your sandals and give it to the person to whom the property or rights had been transferred—your property, your rights had been transferred. Along with the property and the rights, you have him your sandal.

Now notice the two purposes in verse 7 of this bizarre practice. First of all, “to confirm any matter.” That is, having to do with the redemption and exchange of land. The sandal, then, was

a sign that a final, legally binding agreement had been reached. Something had happened if you ended up with the other guy's shoe. The author adds, "This was the manner of attestation in Israel." It was a legal witness to the deal.

Now, having explained this practice, the author goes on in verse 8 to tell us that this is exactly what happened. "So the closest relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.'" And he removed his sandal." And while it doesn't say, obviously, he gave it to Boaz. Verse 9, "Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.'" Boaz summarized the legal agreement that had been reached. He had acquired all of the rights and all of the responsibilities that went with the redemption of Elimelech's estate. And Boaz told the ten elders that he had officially assembled, as well as the crowd (the people that had stopped at the gate to watch this transaction), that they were all witnesses of the agreement. Now, both of these things were important. Think about this. In a simple agricultural society like that, if in the future anyone questioned his ownership of the estate of Naomi's late husband or his legal right to marry Ruth, he had two lines of evidence he could present: the sandal of this anonymous relative; and any surviving witnesses, any of the ten who had survived to that day.

But it becomes clear that Boaz' chief concern was not the land. It was Ruth. Look at verse 10. "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife." Boaz expressed his legal right to marry Ruth. It's also interesting, here for the first time in this book we learn which of Elimelech's sons Ruth had married. It was Mahlon. But the most important thing about verse 10 is not that Boaz intends to marry Ruth, but why. Look at what he says in Verse 10. "In order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birthplace." You know, here is a man of incredible nobility and excellence. Even in this, his chief concern is not gaining a wife. Although it becomes clear that he is committed to Ruth, that he cares deeply for her, I think safe to even say he loves her (although the text doesn't say that), but he is concerned to act in a way for others.

Notice his motives. Three of them. First of all, he says in verse 10, "... to raise up the name of

the deceased on his inheritance.” By the way, let me go back and just say (before I touch on that point, on the previous point I was making), so many people pursue marriage for all the wrong and selfish reasons imaginable. It troubles me deeply. Occasionally, (two occasions, I think, and I can’t stomach more than that) I’ve watched a little of a program with my girls where women are buying their wedding dresses. And they’re talking about getting married. And they talk about it in the most utterly selfish terms. “I’m marrying him because he makes me feel good about myself”—and so forth and so forth. Those of us in Christ, those of us who know God, we ought to still be marrying not only for the joy of marriage, not only for the wonderful relationship that brings, but as well for the good of the other person. Well, back to my notes.

Notice specifically, Boaz mentions three motives here as to why he’s going to marry her. He’s very unselfish in this. The first one, “To raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” That is, to establish his memory by ensuring that he had decedents, and that his inheritance continued to be connected to his descendants.

Secondly, “So that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers.” In other words, to ensure that his memory and family would not be lost to Israel, would not be lost in the nation.

And thirdly, “So that the name of the deceased will not be cut off ... from the court of his birthplace.” Literally, “from the gate of his place.” The “gate” here represents those who met at the gate. In other words, Boaz wanted to guarantee that Elimelech and Mahlon would continue to have family and representation on the town council of the town in which they had lived.

He concludes his speech, notice, by reminding the people there again of their legal role as witnesses. Verse 10 ends, “you are witnesses today.” Verse 11, And “all the people who were in the court, and the elders, said.” Notice, “*we are*” is in italics. It’s not in the original. They simply said “witnesses.” Yes, it’s true, witnesses.

That brings us to another part of this redemption of Ruth, her redeemer, and that is the people’s benediction. In response to all that had happened in the court proceeding, the people and the ten elders break out in a benediction. In a benediction, first of all, on Ruth. Notice verse 11. “May

[Yahweh] make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel.” Now the reason that expression “the woman who is coming into your home,” that sounds a little cold to us. But that borrows from the Jewish wedding ceremony. In a Jewish wedding the groom brought the bride to his home as part of the wedding ceremony. And so, they were saying, may Yahweh bless Ruth, the woman you’re marrying, as He blessed Rachel and Leah.

You remember, of course, the story of Rachel and Leah. They were daughters of Laban, whom Jacob married. Together, these two women were responsible for, really, the twelve tribes of Israel. This is a remarkable blessing. I mean, think about it. Here are Jewish women, who have known this Moabite woman for just a couple of months, and yet they ask their God to bless her, a foreigner from Moab, just like He blessed the matriarchs of Israel, Rachel and Leah. It shows what a profound impact her character had had on them.

Notice the people also pronounced a benediction on Boaz. Verse 11 goes on, “And may you [Boaz] achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.” Ephrathah was just that larger area. It was a more formal ancient name for this area. Now the Hebrew expression translated “achieve wealth,” in the context of marriage like it is here, is better translated “may you prosper.” May you prosper. And then they say, may you “become famous in Bethlehem.” Literally, the Hebrew text says, “may your name be called in Bethlehem.” It’s a beautiful picture. What they mean is this: after your death may your name still be spoken in Bethlehem, may your name survive your death and continue to be spoken long after you have died. You know what’s interesting? Those people had no idea how profoundly God would answer their blessing that day.

Now the rest of their benediction was on the descendants of Ruth and Boaz. Verse 12, “Moreover, may your house ...” That’s a Hebrew idiom for your descendants, those who come after you. “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.” Now as you know, the story—if you’re familiar with the Scripture at all—the story of Perez and Tamar is a sordid one. But that’s not the point here. The point of similarity they’re pointing out between Ruth and Tamar has

nothing to do with the character of these two women, nor does it have to do with the similarity of the nature of their marriages, nor is there a similarity in the manner in which they conceived. You remember, Tamar's child was the product of incest. The point that they had in common, the point of connection between Tamar and Ruth was that they were both in a levirate marriage. Although Tamar's husband had died without leaving an heir, through the child born to Judah and Tamar (his name was Perez), Judah's name lived on in Israel.

Their prayer was the same for Ruth and Boaz. They were praying that Yahweh would bless Ruth and Boaz not with just one child but with many descendants, that God would allow the memory of Ruth and Boaz to survive because of their many descendants. God answered their prayer in an amazing way. Not in just the number of their descendants, but in the singularity, the accomplishment, the renown of their descendants. Daniel Block puts it this way:

Little did those who uttered these words realize how prophetic the words would be. Inspired by the Spirit of God they joined in a spontaneous 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. May God raise up a house for you.

Wow! Did God answer that prayer.

Now, every well-told story like this one has a hero or a heroine. And the biblical account of Ruth is no exception to that. But the hero of this story is not whom most people think it is. Ruth is clearly not the hero. In verse 6 of chapter 4 she is redeemed by Boaz. Nor is Naomi the hero. Later in chapter 4 (as we'll see next time in verses 13 and 14) she will be redeemed by the son whom Ruth bears. And Boaz is not the hero since he too was eventually redeemed by one of his descendants, a very special child born to a young woman from Nazareth named Mary. Instead, as we have seen countless times in this ancient drama, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the real hero of the story. As we have watched this story unfold, we have discovered that (are you ready for this?) the real kinsmen-redeemer is not Boaz. It's God. It's Yahweh.

In a much more profound way than was true of Boaz with Ruth, God is driven by His “hesed”, that wonderful Hebrew word that means His steadfast commitment to His covenant, His love, His steadfast, unfailing, covenantal love to care for His own. For those of us who have sought refuge under Yahweh’s wings, for those of us who have become related to Him by adoption, Yahweh will stop at nothing to care for us and to ensure that His eternal purposes for us are fulfilled. If you doubt that, just look at how He moved heaven and earth to care for His people in this story.

Think for a moment about how He cared for Boaz. He provided a wife for him. He provided a son. He provided, as that Hebrew idiom puts it, a house, a group of descendants. And not just nameless, faceless descendants, but the greatest people to ever come from the nation: David, and later the Christ. He has certainly made Boaz’ name survive. Here we are 3,000 years later on the far side of the world recounting Boaz. God certainly demonstrated His “hesed,” His steadfast love, to Boaz.

But what about Ruth? Look at how God cared for Ruth. Here was a woman who was born as a pagan, a pagan Gentile in a pagan land, worshiping pagan gods with no hope of knowing the true God, and yet in eternity past God had chosen her as His own. And so, He works His providence to ensure that she will hear about Him, the true God. He even uses the sin of one of His own people, Elimelech, who sinfully moves his family to Moab, in order to ensure that she hears about the true God. He reaches into Moab, and He snatches her out of her darkness, out of her idolatry, out of her lostness, out of her paganism, and He draws her to Himself. There are many of you sitting here tonight who resemble very much that story.

And once she had repented, and once Ruth had sought refuge in Him, behind the scenes, God, her Redeemer, her kinsman-redeemer, her goel, ordered His providence to care for her. He moved heaven and earth to make sure that His plans for her life unfolded. It was God who made sure that day that, as the Hebrew says, “her chance chanced upon the field belonging to Boaz”. It was God who made sure that she happened to take a break from her hard morning’s work in the tent there by the field at the very time that Boaz arrived and they had a chance encounter.

But it was no chance. It was designed by the hand of her goel. And He used whatever it took, God did, to accomplish His plans in her life.

Think of all He uses in this story. He used a famine. He used the sin of Elimelech. He used the death of her husband. He used the return of her mother-in-law to the land of Israel. He used all of that. And then He used the great heart of Boaz. He used an obscure law about levirate marriage. He used the radical plans of Naomi. And He even used a legal business transaction at the city gate. The point is that God's "hesed", His steadfast love toward His own, is never failing. It is relentless. It pursues us every day of our lives. And it is everlasting. It's so clear in the story of Ruth. It's so clear, and we rejoice in it.

And yet, let me ask you a question. Why do we doubt that reality in our own lives? Why do we doubt that God our Redeemer is any less concerned, is any less engaged, is any less committed to us than He was to Boaz and Ruth? God is our Redeemer. He is our goel. And He will stop at nothing to care for us and to fulfill both His temporal and His eternal plans for us.

I don't where you find yourself tonight if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, if you confess Yahweh as we were talking about this morning. I don't know what your circumstances are. I don't know how difficult, how hard, how challenging they look. But I plead with you tonight to trust your Redeemer, to trust the One who has your best in mind and who will stop at nothing— He will move heaven and earth to do what He wants to do in your life. And it will always be best however it may look to us. God has a plan, and He is working that plan out every bit as much in your life and mine as He did in the life of Ruth and Boaz. He could give us no greater proof of this than He's given us.

I want you to turn with me to Romans 8. I was meditating my way through this chapter this week, not for any sermon preparation, just to feed my own soul. And I was just struck again and again with how much God says here about His connection to us. Verse 1 of chapter 8 says there's no condemnation because we are in Christ Jesus. He goes to say we have the Spirit of God within us. Verse 9, "The Spirit of God dwells in you." He goes on to say in verse 14 that we "are being led by the Spirit of God." And he says we are the "children of God." And we

“have received a spirit of adoption” in which we can actually say to the almighty God, to Yahweh the self-existent One, “Abba! [Papa!] Father!”

We are, verse 17, “heirs.” We’re “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” We will “be glorified with” Christ, verse 17 says. He goes on to rehearse that someday (verse 23) we will experience the finalizing of our adoption as sons which will be “the redemption of our body.” We’re going to get a new body like His glorious body, like the resurrected body of our Lord. Verse 26, “The Spirit ... helps our weaknesses.” “He intercedes for” us, verse 27. God is causing “all things [in our lives] to work together for good,” because we love Him and because we’ve been “called according to His purpose.” He “foreknew” us in eternity past. He’s “predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son.” He’s called us to Himself. He’s justified us. He’s going to glorify us. Verse 31, so what do we say to all this? God is for you! And if God is for you, who can be against you?

And here is, verse 32. Here’s the proof. “He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him over for us all.” Think about that. He delivered the Son of His love for you. That means He loved you every bit as much as He loved His own Son. “How will He not also with [His own Son] freely give us all things?” Everything you need for life and eternity.

Would He give you Christ? Would He give you the most precious thing He has and not look out for your concerns, not cause all things to work together for good, not order and structure your lives for your benefit, for your ultimate good? We have a Redeemer, and He is committed to us forever with His “hesed”, His steadfast love. And He will move heaven and earth to make sure His purposes are done in our lives.

How do you conclude? Verse 38, Paul says, “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities,” nor something’s that present, nor what’s coming [doesn’t matter], powers, height, depth, whatever you want to talk about (he says), any created thing anywhere in the universe—nothing can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Our lives are every bit as much in His loving care as were the lives of Boaz and Ruth, because He is our Redeemer.

Let's pray together.

Father, what can we say to these things? If You are for us, and clearly You are, who can be against us? If you didn't spare Your own Son, but You freely delivered Him over for us all, how will You not also with Him freely give us all things?

Forgive us, O God, for doubting You. Forgive us for mistrusting You. Forgive us for taking matters into our own hands. Forgive us for becoming angry with You because of our life circumstances.

Father, remind us that You are our goal, and *nothing*, nothing in life or death will ever change that. And having You, we have everything we need.

In Jesus name, Amen.