

RUTH #4

Today we wrap up the story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. This story is often called the greatest short story in the Bible. If you haven't been with us until now, it's been quite a journey for Ruth and Naomi. Ruth, a poor widow, a foreigner in the land of Israel, but deeply devoted to the God of Israel and to her mother-in-law Naomi.

When we last left them, Ruth had made her willingness to marry Boaz known, because he was a kinsman or family redeemer. You will see throughout this book the term, kinsman-redeemer. In the Jewish culture of that day, if a father or husband died, the closest male relative on the father's or husband's side of the family could step in and be what was known as a kinsman redeemer, or family redeemer.

They had the first legal right for marriage, if that was deemed best, particularly if the widow was childless. This was to provide a male heir for the family. Boaz was one of Ruth's kinsman redeemers, but we learned last week in a twist to the story that he wasn't the closest male relative to her dead husband. There was another who was closer.

So that relative had the right to marry her, to fulfill the duty of being her family redeemer before Boaz. However, if he wasn't interested or financially able to redeem her, Boaz could. So, we left the story with Boaz making a commitment to Ruth. He would find this other kinsman redeemer and sort out the issue of marriage. If he could not redeem her, then Boaz would step in and marry her. God is moving in Ruth's life but nevertheless, I would imagine it was a stressful time for her.

¹ Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. ² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said. Ruth 4:1-4.

I like how Laura Smit and Stephen Fowl comment in their theological Commentary on Judges and Ruth, **What Ruth initiated in the darkness at the threshing floor reaches its conclusion in the daylight before witnesses at the town gates.** Boaz sets out to resolve the issues raised by the fact that he is not the closest relative to Naomi and Ruth. We never find out who exactly this closer relative is. Clearly Boaz wants this to be the decisive event at the gate and settle this matter.

Although Boaz must have known who this unnamed redeemer was, he never refers to him by name. The best translation here is the phrase, *so-in-so*. Now, Boaz encounters this, *so-in-so*, at the gate of the town where one can carry out legal and commercial transactions, including issues around marriage in the presence of witnesses.

Now, Leviticus tends to hint that this *so-in-so* should have already extended aid to Naomi and Ruth along the lines that Boaz had done and is clearly willing to do. It could be why he is not mentioned by name. ³⁵ **'If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. ³⁶ Do not take interest or any profit from them, but fear your God, so that they may continue to live among you. ³⁷ You must not lend them money at interest or sell them food at a profit. ³⁸ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God'.** Leviticus 25:35-38.

However, to his credit he does not hesitate to accept his obligations. As Naomi is old and will not have further children, there is currently no one to redeem this land. This is a safe and secure opportunity for him to do this. Boaz seems to know that he needs to clear this up before they even get to Ruth, because it's the real sticking point. It could really upset Boaz's plan to marry Ruth.

Naomi wants to sell the land. It would be a good and just thing for her family redeemer to be the one to buy it so that it stays within the family in case Ruth or Naomi were to ever, somehow, produce a male heir. In other words, they would buy it and keep it in trust until either one produced a male heir.

Contrary to our expectations, Ruth is not the immediate subject of discussion here. ² **Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek"**. In verse two, Boaz produces ten elders from the city. He wants to constitute a legal forum, so proceedings can start.

Once everyone is in place, he wastes no time raising the reason he is there. He gets straight to the point. He also puts pressure on the unnamed redeemer to make a decision quickly. So, he agrees to buy the land. However, Boaz is a crafty negotiator, ⁵ **Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."** ⁶ **At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."** ⁷ **(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of**

legalizing transactions in Israel.) ⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal. Ruth 4:5-8.

So, very quickly the unnamed redeemer realizes that he is not up to fulfilling the social and moral responsibilities associated with buying the land. Then he expresses the transfer symbolically by the physical act that customarily accompanied such a transfer; he removed his sandals and gave them to Boaz. Finally, it looks like we might get our happily ever after finish to this story.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Wow, what a finish and a real twist at the end. I can see why this is often called one of the best short stories ever written. So, Boaz marries Ruth and she has a son and Naomi's life has moved from tragedy to happiness. Remember how Naomi felt at the start of this story, **It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!" Ruth 1:13b.**

Not only did Ruth give birth, but to a son. The role of a family redeemer in the life of a woman like Ruth was to try to ensure that there would be a male heir. The fact that Ruth would conceive and give birth to a son meant that culturally her redemption was complete. So was Naomi's. ¹⁶ **Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. Ruth 4:16.** This description of Naomi holding and loving Obed was the most tender and generous one of her in the entire story. So even that ends on a good note. However, that's not the end of the story.

This verse is important to the story, ¹⁴ **The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!** So, who was this child. Well, there is a book of the Bible that tells his story, the book of Obadiah. However, in verse seventeen there is another twist to the story, ¹⁷ **The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:17.**

The son of Ruth and Boaz was the grandfather of none other than King David. That's not all. Ruth is in the New Testament as well. She's one of the few people who appear in the pages of the Old Testament who are also mentioned in the New Testament and one of the even fewer who were women. It's another reference to genealogy, specifically the genealogy of one person.

Here is yet another twist in the story. This wonderful man, Boaz, was the son of none other than Rahab, whose story is told in the book of Joshua. If you're not familiar with her story, she was a prostitute who ran a brothel and helped the Israelite spies into Jericho because she came to believe in the God of Israel. Rahab and her family were saved and became part of the Jewish people. She left behind her life of prostitution and became one of the most celebrated women in Jewish history. She was the mother of Boaz.

At the root of this story is *hesed*. This rich term enables us to act with loyalty, love, and compassion. When this is combined with integrity, as we see with Boaz, it's a powerful ethic. We can learn much from Boaz because we live in a world that demands to get its own way and is often more than willing to bypass any ethical issue that stands in its way.

In a fallen world that has lost its way, the book of Ruth reaffirms the faithfulness of God. It is easy, sometimes during the stresses of life, to forget that the Lord is sovereign and in control and cares for his people. K. Lawson Younger comments, **Just as God demonstrated his hesed through Boaz to two widows, he demonstrates his loving faithfulness and loyalty to his people today through individuals living out the spirit of his word, motivated by loving commitment to people in need.**

Ruth's willingness to leave her homeland for a new life in Bethlehem emphasizes her courage to step into the unknown, trusting in God's plan. Moreover, her actions resulted in her becoming part of the lineage of David, showcasing how God works through ordinary individuals to fulfill extraordinary purposes. May her story inspire you to strengthen your relationships and trust in God's faithfulness no matter what you face.