

Ruth 4 – The God who redeems

Today we are back in the book of Ruth for the last chapter. It has been a great journey traveling with these two widows through their tragedy and now to get into their triumph in Ruth 4. One of the major themes running throughout this book is the providence of God. In this we see that God is both sovereign and good. He is powerful yet very personal. His fingerprints are everywhere!

Not only do we see the providence of God in this short book, but also the obedience produced by faith. When the providence of God interlocks with the obedience of man, it produces a result.

Throughout we have been seeing providence and obedience working together. Now we are going to see the results. What is the masterpiece that is created when God works and we obey? "What is the end result when God's people step out in faith and live lives devoted and trusting the God of providence? Ruth 1 had begun with 3 funerals, but Ruth 4 will end with a wedding and birth.

We were left with many questions at the end of Ruth 3. Will Naomi have an heir? Who will or will anyone marry Ruth? Will Boaz lose Ruth to the unnamed kinsman redeemer? Remember that in the book of Ruth, two laws come into play. One is called the kinsman redeemer law found in Lev. 25:23-34 and the other is called the levirate marriage law found in Deut. 25:5-10. The purpose of these laws was to keep the name of the deceased alive in the land. For a widow, the nearest relative is supposed to step up and buy the land along with marrying the widow and keeping the name of the family alive. In this case, although Boaz is interested in being the kinsman redeemer, there is someone else ahead of him in the line. As a man of integrity, he will do it the right way and ask this man first. This is where we left off in Ruth 3.

The first twelve verses of Ruth 4 is a legal process, using a lot of legal terminology. There are witnesses, two parties, a contract, property issues, inheritance issues and widow issues. Unlike Ruth 3, the setting in Ruth 4 is not private and secretive like in the dead of night at a threshing floor, but very public in broad daylight at the town square. Lets walk through Ruth 4 together and see what is happening:

I. With obedience comes sacrifice (Ruth 4:1-6).

Boaz gets straight to work. He leaves the threshing floor gets to the gate and stops. He wastes no time. This is a good place to wait for people because everyone going to the fields to work would have to pass through the gate. And behold, there comes the kinsman redeemer! Just as Boaz sits down, the kinsman redeemer walks by. Again we see the providence of God. He just “happened” to walk by at the right moment.

Boaz calls out to him. Interestingly, his name is not mentioned here. Boaz then gathers 10 elders, who were the ruling body which governed the local affairs of the town of Bethlehem. Boaz being a man of influence and stature himself, knew of these men and as they passed through the crowd, he summoned them one by one to come and sit down with him on the bench.

The narrator wants us to know that everything was done legally. These men would serve as witnesses, So Boaz and Mr. So-and-So talk and decide on the matter, the elders act as the witnesses. Boaz sets up everything in place and begins the discussion.

Ruth 4:3. You can imagine as these 12 men are sitting there, a larger crowd starts to form around them to see what the commotion is about. By the way, most probably, Naomi and Ruth were standing in the crowd already and watching. Merchants are peeking around their customers to see if they can get an earshot of the meeting. Boaz begins first with the land issue – that Naomi is going to sell it.

The sad part about this is that this kinsman had done nothing since Naomi and Ruth returned. No stopping by to see how they are doing. No food provided. No consideration whatsoever. Nothing. He’s the kind of man who does nothing. Nothing bad or good. Just nothing. I wonder what Boaz thought of this guy? Now his responsibility is laid before him.

Boaz looks up and tells him that if he is willing he should redeem it. Boaz acknowledges the other people who have been watching and the elders present to be witnesses. Without a redeemer Naomi may lose the land to a lesser known relative or even a non-relative. As a result, she will lose the family name (as it is tied to the land) and will live with Ruth as widows the rest of their lives in poverty. This would be the greatest tragedy imaginable.

To everyone’s surprise, the kinsman redeemer says yes. Just imagine it: Boaz heart must have sunk. Naomi and Ruth get worried. Ruth clutches Naomi’s arm. Romance is crushed by legality. Yet another setback! Boaz then reads the fine print in Ruth 4:5. Here is the pivotal point of the story. Boaz leans forward and says, “There is one thing, however.” He

continues, “Ruth the Moabite,” motioning to her in the crowd, “comes with the property. When you buy the property, she comes with it. And when you have children with her, they will keep the family name alive.”

Is he willing to pay the price? He was greedy to take it when there was no price to pay. Boaz really says, “Hold on mister, it is not going to be that easy! You have to sacrifice.” Nothing is free. Do you have what it takes to do this? Now comes the moment of truth. What will the kinsman say?

All of a sudden he says, “I cannot do it.” By his word choice, he stresses not his unwillingness, but his inability to act. He says in essence, “I cannot afford it.” Any addition to the man’s family would ruin his children’s inheritance.

He would, first, here buy Naomi’s property from assets that eventually are part of his estate---only to lose that investment when Ruth’s first child claimed it, presumably without cost, as Elimelech’s heir. Meanwhile, the child’s care and feeding would further drain his wealth.

If there was a child from the relationship with Ruth, the redeemer would lose the field and there would be no benefit to his own children and estate to compensate for the costs involved in taking care of Naomi and Ruth. In other words, Mr. So-and-So was interested in ministry to the poor only if there was a payoff for himself and his family.

He is not willing to pay the price without personal payoff. “Forget it! YOU do it” he says in Ruth 4:6. The people in the crowd start whispering among themselves. The ironic thing about this is that in seeking to protect his own legacy, Mr. So-and-So ends up nameless, missing just short of having a share in the biggest legacy of all: a link in the chain of God’s purposes to bring Jesus into the world.

He is like Orpah in Ruth 1. He took the easy way out. He is a picture of the ordinary guy. He does not do anything bad, but he does not do anything good either. In Ruth we meet three types of men. Elimelech is the kind of guy who steps up and acts foolishly. Boaz is the kind of guy (which we will see in a minute) who steps up and acts according to God’s will and ways, taking extraordinary action by faith. Mr. So-and-so is the kind of guy who does not do anything at all.

He is the kind of guy who asks, “What’s in it for me? Will it fulfill me? Will I enjoy it?”. To be honest, I am convicted by this guy. I can become like him if I am not careful.

We can easily slip into just receiving all the time and giving, We can easily get into a routine where I am going through the motions and not chasing hard after God. I do not want to just get by, clinging to what I have, but I want to be stepping out in faith, taking risks and through obedience to God willing to make the sacrifice. There is a price to pay to be obedient to God: everything you have! It will require all of you. Your time, resources, energy and devotion. There is no sacrifice too great for the One who made the ultimate sacrifice!

Secondly,

II. God blesses sacrificial obedience (Ruth 4:7-12)

Back to Ruth 4:7. The Narrator pauses to talk to us directly. He wants to explain the symbolic custom that was about to take place. Apparently, to symbolize the transaction, a person’s sandal was removed and given to the person who received the rights. So he bends down and quickly unties the sandal and hands it to Boaz, publicly validating the transaction. The passing of the sandal symbolized Boaz’s right to walk on the land as his property (cf. Deut. 1:36; 11:24; Josh. 1:3; 14:9). [1]

“Buy it for yourself!” Mr. So-and-So gets up and walks off, he exits the story and we never hear from him again like Orpah in Ruth 1:14.

Gripping the sandal firmly in his hand, he stands up and makes his speech. There were many onlookers the scene had attracted. So he addresses the elders and the crowd as witnesses. These are the last words of Boaz spoken in this story. Look at Ruth 4:9-10. Boaz formally established ownership of anything (land, houses, movable goods, etc.) which belonged to Elimelech and his sons.

Boaz recall’s Ruth’s double misfortune: her non-Israelite ethnicity and her tragic widowhood. But this is the last time she will be called a Moabite. She will soon be a wife. He finally answers Ruth’s question in Ruth 3:9. Boaz indeed did accomplish the task that day as Naomi had predicted (Ruth 3:18).

The first child born to Ruth and Boaz would own Elimelech’s family property and keep him and his sons alive in association with it. Naomi’s poor heirless family will survive. The name of the deceased would survive in the land. The names would survive from two important

realms: his family circle, the extended family of relatives within the clan. Secondly, the names would survive from the assembly of the town...the community at large. In Ruth 4:11, the elders stand up in their prayer shawls and say in unison, "We are witnesses." A second later, the crowd joins in, "We are witnesses!"

However, another problem existed. Remember Ruth and Mahlon were married about 10 years and they did not have any children. Ruth was barren! Here is another obstacle. We have seen so many setbacks in this story, but Ruth perseveres throughout! So the people are going to pray three prayers of blessings in Ruth 4:11-12. The first prayer is for Ruth to become like Rachel and Leah, who were the founding mothers of the tribe of Israel. Ruth is no longer a Moabite, but in every way an Israelite. She has full status now! From nothing, Rachel and Leah built the house of Israel, i.e., through 12 children. So they are praying for Yahweh to open the womb of Ruth to bear many children who will leave a legacy like the 12 sons of Jacob.

Next they pray for Boaz. Again he is called a man of "worth." Ephrathah is another name for Bethlehem. They are praying for him to continue to be a man of integrity and through Ruth, to have a host of worthy sons that will make your name renowned in Bethlehem. In other words, they are praying for Boaz to be a legacy maker!

Look at Ruth 4:12. The last prayer is for the family line of Boaz. The people recall another story where someone's husband died and a brother was asked to marry the widow. The story is found in Genesis 38. It is about Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. When following Tamar's husband's death none of his brothers stepped up to marry her, she pretended to be a prostitute and seduced Judah her father-in-law and got herself pregnant through him. She bore twins and one of them was named Perez.

Although the whole situation was scandalous, Perez nevertheless became one of the leading families in Bethlehem. In fact, Boaz came from that line (Ruth 4:18ff). But notice the key here is that the people realize that only God can give the offspring. They recognize that every good and perfect gift comes from Him (James 1:17). He is the ultimate gift giver!

Both Boaz and Ruth were incredible devoted followers, but they realized that to make a legacy, God had to do it. See, we can either try to make our name great or make His name great in our lives.

When we live in obedience and God blesses us He deserves the glory. Boaz and Ruth had done everything they could, but at the end of the day, God had to intervene by opening up her womb. Even until the end of this story, the people are in a place where only God can get the glory.

Some of you are waiting for things in your life. I want you to remember today that God loves to put you in a position where it will not be your education, your charming personality, your looks, your know-how, your financial stability, your resources, your connections, or anything else you can think of that will get you through, but God Himself stepping in. You will often find yourself brought down to nothing before God can bring something out of it.

Our culture is one that focuses on the immediate. Instant gratification. We all want instant meals, instant connection to the internet, instant service on the phone and at restaurants. What can I get *right now*? What I can I feel *right now*? What works *right now*? No concern over the consequences or what it means in the long run. No thinking about patience or waiting. No worries about who is going to get hurt in the process. No worries about what God thinks. It is time of the judges! Everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25).

But the Word of God is counter cultural. God seems to like to take His time with things. He seems to love teaching His people about patience and waiting. Sometimes we may want to quit and run away. But if we hold on, God is in control and has greater purposes behind it all. You just make sure your desire is to follow Him in obedience and trust.

You will often find yourself at the end of the rope and see God holding the last strand. So don't be alarmed. Don't be surprised. He is the ultimate gift giver but its in his timing.

So a obedient follower pays a price of sacrifice and is blessed by God. Lastly,

III. There will be obstacles along the way (Ruth 4:13-22).

So Boaz and Ruth finally marry and she becomes his wife. Notice the status changes in the life of Ruth. In Ruth 2:10 she is called a "foreigner." In Ruth 2:13, she calls herself lower than a "servant." In Ruth 3:9, she called herself a maidservant, i.e. someone eligible for marriage. Now she is called a wife. All that Boaz is and has is now hers. She is in a place of blessing.

Look at Ruth 4:13 again. God does in fact step in and helps her conceive and conceive a son! She was barren for 10 years and gets pregnant on the first try. Prayers are answered for a

future. In Ruth 4:14, the scene shifts to Naomi and her friends. What a tender God we have who really ministers grace to this broken women in this story. Naomi is the last focus of the story.

We had seen these neighbourhood women in chapter 1 with Naomi as well. They had heard her cry of emptiness (Ruth 1:20-21), but now they rejoice regarding her fullness. They give all credit to God for everything that has happened. They call the son a redeemer because he will carry on the family name and inherit the property and save this family.

They again pray for him, but say a prayer greater than the earlier prayer for Boaz. Remember for Boaz they prayed for his name to be renown in Bethlehem, but for this child, they ask for his name to be renown not just in Bethlehem, but in all of Israel!

In Ruth 4:15, they see the little child as an answer to two prayers in the life of Naomi, family and food.

They also give a tribute to Ruth. We see what true love is through her haven't we? It was not just about emotions, but actions demonstrated through costly commitment (Ruth 1: 16-17), determined initiative (Ruth 2:7), courage on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:5-6) and dedication to preserve Naomi's family (Ruth 3:9-10). Ultimately it was her sacrificial love, putting others ahead of herself. Israel was encouraged to love the Lord with all of their being (Deut. 6:5) and to love the neighbour as themselves (Lev. 19:18), including strangers and foreigners (Lev. 19:34). Here, it is the stranger from Moab who shows Israel what God truly wanted. They compare Ruth to seven sons, the ideal number of sons for an Israelite family. In a society where sons were valued above daughters, to say this about a woman was the ultimate tribute. Remember in Ruth 1:21, Naomi totally forgot about Ruth and said she was totally empty? Here Ruth finally gets the recognition! The women tell Naomi that having Ruth with her was better than having Mahlon, Chilion or even seven sons.

In Ruth 4:16, we see a tender scene. Gray-haired Naomi with the little child nestled against her. She would care for him like his very own mother. She had emptied by famine and death. Now she is full again. Famine, barrenness and death are now replaced by new birth, life and hope.

The women of the neighborhood rejoice with Naomi. Before Naomi had cried out in despair and the women listened. Now Naomi listens as the women cry out in joy! What an amazing

turn of events for her! The Psalmist says, “Weeping may endure for a moment, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5).

The child’s name is Obed is given in Ruth 4:17. It is tough to decipher exactly what Obed means, but most likely it means “one who serves.” He is the one who will serve Naomi and her family line. But notice the author immediately telling us the future. He will become the father of Jesse, who will father David, the great king Israel!

Lastly, in Ruth 4:18-22, we have the genealogy of Perez, the son of Judah.

Turn to Matthew 1. Usually we skip over these names when they read them, but in this chapter we see the legacy made by Boaz and Ruth eventually led to the birth of the Saviour of the world.

But Naomi and Ruth would tell you that the path to this point was never a straight line. It came traveling through the valleys, storms of life. And so for us, we need to remember that God writes the final chapter. He is not done with us yet. He is still taking our tangled threads and weaving it together for His purpose. Perhaps he will use us to do greater things for Him with the next generation? Obed’s name means one who serves. This is appropriate because he actually served God’s greatest purpose in sending Jesus to us.

Yes we too have a Redeemer! We were foreigners, strangers and outcasts. He has bought us with a price, not with silver or gold, but with the blood of His Son (1 Pet. 1:18-19). He gave everything so that we could be His. Now just like all that Boaz is and had was Ruth’s, all that the Lord Jesus is and has is ours. Why did He do all that? So that we can be part of His plan to bring His glory and light to this dark world.

Let us not be people of instant gratification just trying to get by but instead be people who seek to follow God’s will for our lives, despite the obstacles. We do it in obedience and trust and then wait to see Gods hand of providence at work as He blesses us. Let’s pray at the same time for our lives to be so marked with passion for the Lord, love for His Word and the lost that we will leave behind something for our future generations to talk about...better yet, *someone* to talk about – the one who fuelled our passion.