

## **“The Redeemer Comes” – Ruth 4 – November 25, 2018**

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Today we come to the fourth and final chapter in the book of Ruth. After the night on the threshing floor, Boaz goes out to the city gate and happens to discover the other man who is the closer kinsman-redeemer to the family of Elimelech. Here too we discover that Naomi has a parcel of land belonging to her dead husband, which probably had been taken over by someone else during their ten year stay in Moab. The duty of the kinsman-redeemer was to return the land to the rightful owner. Boaz presents the scenario to the man, who agrees to purchase the land. However, when he learns that having to marry the Moabite woman Ruth is part of the deal, he relinquishes his right to redeem the property. Then Boaz proclaims to the town elders and others gathered at the town gate his intention to buy the land and marry Ruth. The people, having served as witnesses to his declaration, bless him and wish him a fruitful marriage.

Boaz and Ruth come together, and for the first time in the story, the narrator specifically announces a deliberate action by God. The story tells us that God caused Ruth to conceive. Ruth, who had been barren for years while married to Mahlon in the country of Moab, immediately conceives by Boaz and bears a son. The birth of this male child is a joyous occasion. But the birth is also a significant event. The women of Bethlehem understand the importance of this child and they come forward, proclaiming that a redeemer has been born. But the one the one they are referring to in needing redemption is Naomi, not Ruth.

The townswomen remembered Naomi’s deep grief and despair when she returned to Judah from Moab. She had lost her husband and her two sons. She had gained Ruth – but a widow and a foreigner did not seem such a great prize, at least in terms of Naomi’s future security. Ruth loved her mother-in-law, but her love and devotion could not fill the emptiness that Naomi experienced from the loss of her family. Ruth’s marriage to Boaz guaranteed security for Naomi, but the emptiness remained. But in the birth of this male child, the townswomen recognized a redeemer for Naomi, one who would restore her and nourish her in her old age. One who would fill her emptiness and make her whole again. The women also proclaimed that Ruth is better than seven sons could have been, not only by giving Naomi this gift of a child, but because of her ongoing devotion and loving-kindness that she has shown to Naomi.

In calling the child Naomi’s son and redeemer, the townswomen are affirming there is much more to redemption than simply retaining a parcel of property within the family. Naomi’s life had gone from emptiness back to fullness. The Lord had not abandoned Naomi, but in effect, through the actions of Ruth and Boaz, had turned her life completely around. In verse 15 the women say that the child Obed will restore her life. The word “life” in Hebrew refers to the whole person and to the inner most self. These words, “restore her life” or “restore her soul”

are the same words used in the familiar 23rd Psalm, where it says “he leads me beside still waters and restores my soul.”

This setting of this book was during the time in Israel’s history of the judges. The time of the judges was a rather turbulent time in the history of Israel. It was a cyclical period when Israel would fall away from God, experience great turmoil, call out to God for help, and then God would redeem them through a judge. The judges brought the people back together and back to God. But the redemption, or salvation, by each judge was never long-lived. The story of Ruth ends by telling us that this child Obed was to be the grandfather of King David. This story then, serves as an introduction us to period of Israel’s monarchy.

David eventually became Israel’s greatest and most beloved king. So much so, the prophets of Israel later announced King David to be the ancestor of the coming Messiah. If you look in chapter one of the Gospel of Matthew, you will find the names of Ruth, Boaz, and Obed in the genealogy of Jesus. This story of redemption found in the Book of Ruth, is a foreshadowing of the greatest story of redemption – when God took on human flesh and dwelled among us as Jesus Christ, and it is through his life, death and resurrection that Jesus Christ became the redeemer of all humanity.

It is interesting to note that neither of Obed’s parents can boast a non-dysfunctional family heritage. As a Moabite, Ruth was descended from the incestuous relationship between the man Lot and his eldest daughter. The product of that relationship was the boy, Moab, who became the ancestor of the Moabite people. On Boaz’s side of the family, there was scandal also. As a citizen of the town of Bethlehem, Boaz was a descendant of the house of Judah through his son Perez. Judah had relations with his daughter-in-law Tamar, and the boy Perez was the result of that union. Then Obed’s own grandson David lusted after the woman Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah, so that David might wed her. Their son Solomon was also part of the genealogy of Jesus.

These examples show us that the mothers and fathers in the lineage of the Messiah were not necessarily what we would consider as the worthiest of people. They were flawed human beings just as we are. The point is that God can use even the least likely of agents to bring about redemption in this world. Imperfect people, responding to others in love, kindness, and compassion can offer instances of redemption to those in need of it.

If we look at the main characters in the Book of Ruth, perhaps we can learn something from each one. Boaz is called a worthy man. But is it really so hard to be called worthy when one is wealthy and is a powerful citizen in the community? He has a remarkable way of pronouncing blessings upon all with whom he made contact, but it took a foreigner who was also a widowed woman to point out to him that he needed to begin to practice what he preached. Sometimes kind words and prayers are not enough. Sometimes we actually need

to get involved by performing acts of redemption to bring about positive change for those who are marginalized in our communities.

Then there is Ruth According to society, she had many strikes against her. A foreigner. A woman. A displaced widow. People are quick to attach unfair labels on others, judging people by stereotypes, rather than seeing them for who they are, beloved by and created in the image of God. We see her as one marginalized, but she teaches us lessons in kindness and devotion, demonstrating the intense love that God has for each of us. We may not be able to parallel her intense devotion and hesed that she showed to her mother-in-law, but we can aspire to care for others as she did.

Perhaps it is with Naomi that we find the most congruence. Naomi was quick to blame God for her great losses and her feelings of emptiness, and she was unable to acknowledge the depth of loyalty that Ruth showed to her. But over time, she became aware of how God worked in her life and allowed herself to receive God's redemption. Like Naomi, we are receivers of unmerited love by God, through other people. Naomi reflects the reality of who we are as flawed humans in need of redemption.

The message of the gospel is that the loving kindness of God is freely given to us. By grace we receive God's mercy and blessings. So it is with renewed hope that we can anticipate the celebration of the birth of our savior. Redemption comes in many and various forms. For us, and all of humanity, redemption comes in the form of an innocent child, a baby whose genealogy is less than perfect but whose love is all encompassing. With eagerness and joy we await his arrival. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.