

Blessed Be the Lord, Who Has Not Left You

The Redemption of Ruth and Restoration of Naomi

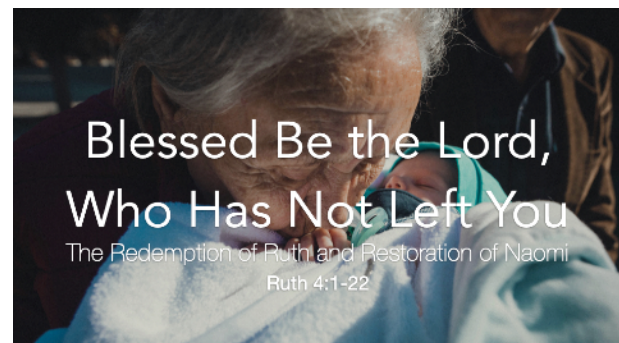
Scripture: Ruth 4:1-22

Sermon Series: *From Bitterness to Blessing*

Topic: Redeemer, Ruth, Naomi

Introduction

We now arrive at Act IV and the final act in this drama. In this last chapter, we see a chorus of neighborhood women praising the *Lord who has not left* these two widows. He pours out his *blessings* upon them through the *redemption of Ruth* and the *restoration of Naomi*.



The chapter opens with attention on Boaz, but then it concludes with the focus returning to Naomi. But that is not where the story ends. Just as we see in the Marvel movies, as the credits are rolling, we get a slight surprise when an unexpected scene turns the attention to a coming future redeemer, king David.

The previous chapter centered at the threshing floor and ended after a midnight marriage proposal by Ruth to Boaz. Ruth said to Boaz, “*Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer*” (3:9). Boaz responded favorably, but he reported that was a redeemer closer than him. Boaz promised to redeem Ruth if the nearer redeemer would not. Ruth then left the threshing floor and went home to tell Naomi everything that happened. Naomi then told Ruth to rest, for Boaz would not rest until he had dealt with this situation.

In this final chapter, there are two scenes. The first takes place in the city gate (vs.1-12) while the second centers in the new home of Boaz and his wife Ruth. This Act begins with the focus on Boaz, but it concludes with a focus on Naomi and her new grandson.

Act IV: Main Idea

The primary point of this chapter is that God cares about and provides for those who seek refuge in him, while at the same time unfolding his loving plan of redemption. This story began with Naomi proclaiming her bitterness and her emptiness that had resulted from all the sorrow that she had to endure. But by the time the story ends Naomi's bitterness is replaced with blessing and her formerly empty arms are filled with a newborn baby boy.

Scene 1: The Redemption of Ruth in the City Gate (vs.1-12)

The first scene takes place in the city gate of Bethlehem, where Boaz opens a formal hearing to decide what will happen with the widow Naomi, her land, and her widowed daughter-in-law. In this scene we will see,

- 1) the redeemers gathered,
- 2) 2) the redemption discussed,
- 3) 3) the redemption confirmed, and finally
- 4) 4) the redemption will be blessed.

1) The Redeemers Gathered (vs.1-2)

We begin in the city gate where the *redeemers gather*.

¹ Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. Ruth 4:1-2 (ESV)

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there (v.1). It appears Boaz has gone straight from the threshing floor to the gate of the city of Bethlehem. Apparently he didn't even go home. As the day dawned, following the midnight marriage proposal, he went straight to city gate and *sat down*. In antiquity, *the city gate* functioned essentially like a community center, town hall, and courthouse. It "was the center of public life and the place where official administrative business was conducted."¹ All those passing by and seeing Boaz seated in the gate "would have recognized this as an official act; he had come for legal business."²

And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by (v.1). The word '*behold*' catches our attention to note what follows. The *redeemer*, whom Boaz spoke of to Ruth, "*came by*." How interesting. The very man who was needed to resolve the issue at hand, just *happened* to pass by. Just as Naomi and Ruth "happened" to arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of harvest and as Ruth "happened" into the field of Boaz and just as Boaz

¹ Daniel I. Block, *Ruth: The King Is Coming*, ed. Daniel I. Block, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 204.

² Block, *Ruth: The King Is Coming*, 205.

"happened" to be related to Naomi's deceased husband, so now the one person who could be an impediment to this story's progress, just "happened" to walk by.

"Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down (v.1). Boaz sees this man and invites him to sit and discuss business. The man agrees and sat down with Boaz. The phrase *"turn aside"* takes us back to the burning bush. When Moses saw the bush on fire, but noted that it was not being burnt up or consumed, then he said, *"I will turn aside to see this great sight"* (Ex 3:3).

Oh let us not be so busy that we fail to "turn aside" and see what God is doing around us and in our own lives. Today is the second Sunday of Advent, which is a season of waiting and expectation. Let us think of our Lord often during this season. Let us turn aside to him regularly. Don't let this season be a season of hustle and bustle such that we fail to take time to stop and listen and look and pray and pause. Plan to pause and pray to our heavenly Father and sweet Savior during this season.

He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down (v.2). After getting this "friend" to sit with Boaz, now both redeemers have gathered. Boaz then gathers *"ten elders"* to conduct the official business Boaz desired to discuss. It is similar to calling a jury. These ten also *"sat down,"* completing all that was necessary to conduct official business with full legal authority.

2) The Redemption Discuss (vs.3-6)

With the redeemers gathered, Boaz could now *discuss the redemption*.

³ Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." ⁵ Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." ⁶ Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it." **Ruth 4:3-6 (ESV)**

Naomi... is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech (v.3). We have not been informed of this decision up to this point, but you'll recall that a period of about two months passed from the closing of chapter 2 and the opening of chapter 3. Thus, at some point Naomi has informed Boaz of her intention to sell her husband's land. Within Israelite culture, keeping land within the clan was always the primary aim, thus all sale of land were first

offered to relatives. Since the redeemer is closer to Naomi than is Boaz, he acknowledged the redeemers right to the land preceded his own.

I will redeem it (v.4). The redeemer agrees to purchase the land. Upon hearing this, the hearts of the readers of this story would sink. That which we feared has come upon us. Boaz will not be able to marry Ruth if the nearer redeemer buys the land and he has just agreed to do so. This is not happy news. But Boaz has an ace up his sleeve.

The day you buy the field... you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead (v.5). Boaz has now noted the doubled financial burden attached to the redemption of this land. Not only will the price of the purchase of the land be exacted, but so will the cost of the maintenance of Ruth as a wife. Additionally, there will also be the requirement of *"perpetuating the name of the dead in his inheritance."* Since Elimelech had died and also his eldest son, Mahlon³, to whom Ruth was married, then the idea of levirate marriage comes to play in order that the name of the deceased will not be forgotten. These additional facts change the situation.

I cannot redeem it... lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption (v.6). In some way that is not exactly clear, the attachment of Ruth to this transaction introduces for this redeemer an insurmountable barrier. He notes that he *"cannot redeem it... lest he impair his own inheritance."* Some have wondered if the fact that Ruth "the Moabite" was the source of his "impairment." Or perhaps the impairment lies in the fact that if Ruth had a son, then the land would eventually be passed on to that son and not to his present children. The exact "impairment" is unclear, but what is clear is that this new information has caused this nearer redeemer to forfeit his *right of redemption*. The right of redemption has been stated and passed from the nearer redeemer to Boaz! Now our hearts leap with joy!

3) The Redemption Confirmed (vs.7-10)

Having now been given the right of redemption, Boaz *confirms* the *redemption*.

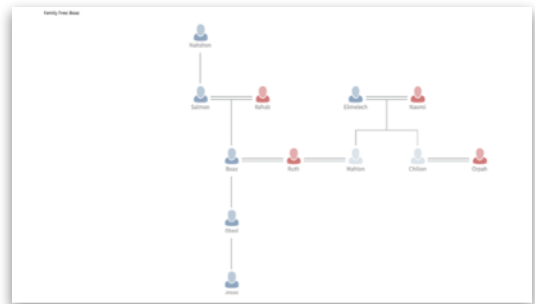
⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." Ruth 4:7-10 (ESV)

³ Ruth 1:2.

One drew off his sandal and gave it to the other (v.7). This custom is explained because at the time of the writing of this story, that custom had fallen out of use. This custom is rooted in a practice mentioned in Deuteronomy 25:9, but there the custom was different than it is applied here. However, think of this custom as equivalent to our signature on a legal document. To confirm that that redeemer was forfeiting his right of redemption, "*he drew off his sandal*" and gave it to Boaz.

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people (v.9). As this business meeting was taking place, a crowd gathered. At first, it was Boaz, the redeemer, and the ten elders, but as this took place in the city gate, when people were passing through and by, they stopped to see what the purpose of the meeting was and to understand what was taking place. Boaz made a public statement, "*You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech...*" and his sons, and "*also Ruth the Moabite... to be my wife...*"

Boaz is not ashamed to have a Moabite as his wife. A woman of questionable origin is not off-putting to Boaz since his own mother had a questionable beginning. Boaz is the right man for Ruth, for his mother was Rahab, the prostitute, whose faith saved the lives of her and her family.



Boaz is not embarrassed to publicly claim Ruth as his wife. He is not averse to publicly declaring his intention to honor the name of his deceased relative, Mahlon, and to see to it that his name is not forgotten in their town.

How do we honor the dead and see to that their names are not forgotten? Sometimes we name parks or buildings or streets after them. It is right and honorable to remember our relatives who have died. At this time of the year, their absence is noted.

Boaz publicly declared his intention to redeem the land "*from the hand of Naomi*" and to take as his wife "Ruth the Moabite." How will the people respond?

4) The Redemption Blessed (vs.11-12)

All the people in the city gate respond by publicly *blessing this redemption*.

¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman." Ruth 4:11-12 (ESV)

May the LORD make the woman... like Rachel and Leah (v.11). “All the people” are happy to be witnesses of this redemption. They pronounce a blessing upon Ruth by likening her to be a fruitful as *Rachel and Leah*, who were Jacob’s wives. This is an astonishing blessing upon a foreign woman. The people essentially pray a prayer of blessing from Yahweh that Ruth find “a place among the matriarchs of Israel.”⁴ Both Rachel and Leah endured seasons of childlessness, but God blessed them both by being mothers to the patriarchs. The people are praying a benediction over Ruth asking the Lord to give her children (since she had been married for ten years and had no children).

May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem (v.11). After blessing Ruth, the people bless Boaz. We have already been told that Boaz was a “*worthy man*” (2:1) and the people pray that his worthiness would be magnified. They pray that his name would be famous in Bethlehem.

May your house be like the house of Perez (v.12). Perez was the son of Judah by Tamar, through the failed execution of levirate marriage, but Perez is probably mentioned because his descendants settled in the area around Bethlehem.

Because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman (v.12). This blessing expects children to be born to Boaz and Ruth. And it is clearly acknowledged that children are a gift from the LORD. Ultimately it is God who gives life. Life comes from him. He is sovereign over the opening and the closing of the womb. The elders and all the people are happy with this turn of events and offer their blessing upon both Ruth and Boaz. This redemption is blessed. The scene at the city gate is now concluded.

Scene 2: The Restoration of Naomi in the House of Boaz & Ruth (vs.13-17)

The scene now shifts briefly to the wedding and then to new home of Boaz and Ruth.

1) Marriage & Birth (vs.13)

In one sentence at least nine months pass.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. **Ruth 4:13 (ESV)**

The narrator skips all the wedding details and goes straight to the fulfillment of the blessing that we read had been prayed over Boaz and his young wife. The language used here points us to the sexual purity of their marriage. Nothing immoral happened during the night on the threshing floor. Their union was not consummated until after “*Ruth became his wife.*” Only

⁴ Daniel I. Block, *Ruth: The King Is Coming*, ed. Daniel I. Block, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 225.

thereafter did “*the LORD give her conception.*” Again, we have a reminder that children are a gift from the LORD. And God have them a son! The redemption of Ruth is now complete. She has a husband, a home, and now a son.

2) The Restoration of Naomi (vs.14-17)

Now the attention turns to Naomi where we see *the restoration of Naomi*.

14 Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. 17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:14-17 (ESV)

Then the women said to Naomi (v.14). We’ve seen “the women” before. We first met them in chapter 1 where we read, “*And the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’*” (1:19). Upon her return to Bethlehem after a decade in Moab, Naomi looked so depressed that the women who had known her previously could scarcely recognize her. Now, “the women” were saying something very different.

Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without (v.14). The women of the neighborhood are now blessing the LORD for all that He has done for Naomi. She returned to Bethlehem in bitterness of soul, but *this* day her soul is blessed. She returned thinking that the LORD had abandoned her, but *this* day these women reminded her that “*the LORD has not left you.*” God has not forsaken this widow. This is the heart of this chapter. Yes, she had lost her husband and her two sons, but she had not lost God for her God had not lost her. Yes, she had to endure hard things, but the Lord through them had planned her good! God had neither not left her, nor has he left her *without*! She now *has*...! What does she have?

A redeemer, may his name be renowned in Israel (v.14). The loving LORD has given Naomi a *redeemer*. The blessing is pronounced upon this redeemer, that “*his name be renowned.*” We’ve heard this before. In the city gate just such a blessing was pronounce over Boaz. Thus, we could easily be tempted to think this is referring to Boaz. However, if we keep reading these women go far beyond Boaz.

He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age (v.15). This redeemer will “*restore life*” to Naomi. He will give her a reason to live. He will pour courage into her body and restore the vitality of her soul. And he will “*nourish her in old age.*” This redeemer will care for her as she advances in years. He will pour life into her and ensure that the life she has is healthily maintained. But is referring to Boaz or someone else?

Your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him (v.15). Ruth is praised as the "*daughter-in-law who loves you*." Ruth is renowned for her love of her mother-in-law. The ladies of the town praise Ruth for her unfailing love of Naomi. And she is better "*than seven sons*." Ruth is a delight to Naomi. But why is she better than seven sons? Because she "*has given birth*." Sons do not give birth, even when there are seven of them. You could have seven hundred men, but without even one woman, there will be zero children. However, note that this long sentence terminates at the redeemer, the one who *has been born* to Ruth. The redeemer who is being blessed by the women is the one whom Ruth has given birth to. This little baby boy is the one being spoken of as "restoring life" to Naomi and the one who will "nourish her in her old age." It is true that grandchildren pour life into grandparents, but there is a hint that these women speak better than they know. We will see the prophetic wisdom in their words at the end of the chapter.

Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse (v.16). Naomi became nanny. She is grandma and nanny, but maybe it's easier to simply call her granny 😊! Imagine this with me. An elderly woman looking upon a child she earlier assumed she would never see. She who returned to Bethlehem empty, now has her lap filled with a newborn child. She who came back carrying nothing, is now carrying a grandson. She who previously had no reason to live, is now filled with reason to live. She who despaired of life, is now full of life!

The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi" (v.17). This is interesting, in that Naomi rather than Ruth is the focus. The women do not say that a son was born to Boaz nor to Ruth, but rather a son has been born to Naomi. This of course points us primarily to consider what God has done in the life of Naomi first. It is Naomi's new fullness that the author wants us to be keep in mind.

They named him Obed... the father of Jesse, the father of David (v.17). They named the baby boy, *Obed*, which means, "one who serves,"⁵ or "servant."⁶ It may be a shortened form of Obadiah, which means, "servant of Yahweh." Naomi's grandson became the father of Jesse, who is the father of David, king of Israel. Naomi is great grandmother to the greatest king of Israel, king David.

Epilogue: The Lineage of David (vs.18-22)

That final sentence leads us to an epilogue.

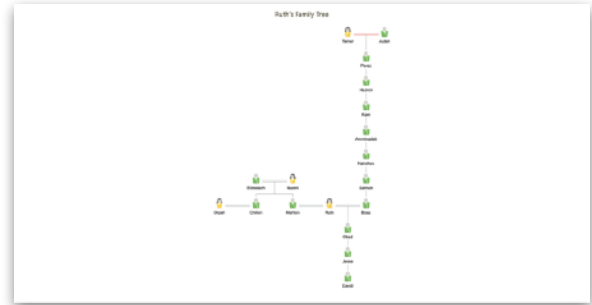
¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered

⁵ Daniel I. Block, *Ruth: The King Is Coming*, ed. Daniel I. Block, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 240.

⁶ F. B. Huey Jr., "Ruth," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 547.

Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David. Ruth 4:18-22

To help us keep the timeline before us, recall that Perez was the son of Judah, one of the twelve sons of the son of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. From Judah descended Boaz and from him, descended king David, who was born in Bethlehem.



It was to David that God made the promise that one of his descendants would reign on the throne of Israel forever and this forever king would also be born in Bethlehem. We are preparing to celebrate the birth of this descendant, who was born in Bethlehem, him whom we call Christ Jesus.

A genealogy is an curious way to conclude a story. The burden of the text lands on David, the greatest king and redeemer of Israel. Thus, we should consider what is the author doing but moving our attention from Naomi the Bethlehemite to David the Bethlehemite. Through both of them God was working out his loving plan of redemption.

Conclusion

There are at three points to consider in conclusion.

1. **God never leaves those who seek refuge in him.** Naomi left the land of Israel for a season, but she returned to take refuge in the Lord's land. Ruth joined her. Boaz praised Ruth for coming to the Lord saying, "*May full blessing be given to you by Yahweh, under whose wings you have come to take refuge*" (2:12). It's never too late to come home to the Father. No matter how long you've been gone, or how far you've wandered, it's never too late to do the right thing. In your heart, turn to the Lord today. Come to him who created you for himself. Come this day and take refuge in the Lord Jesus. Blessed be the LORD who never leaves his children!
2. **God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary plans.** Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz are very ordinary people. Yet through them God does extraordinary things. God used two grieving widows as an example of unfailing love. The words of Ruth to her mother-in-law are often quoted to this day in weddings as an example of the kind of unfailing love and lasting devotion that ought to be present between husband and wife. God used an aging bachelor to be a blessing to a barren young widow and the result was the greatest king of Israel and later the son of God himself descended from them. Do not think that because you are ordinary that God is unable to through you do extraordinary things.

3. **God never fails to fulfill his redemptive purposes.** This story takes place at a very dark time in the history of Israel, at a time *"when everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* However, even in such dark times, God keeps for himself certain faithful people. God showed his favor (i.e. grace) on certain people throughout history in order to bring his Son and our Savior into this world. God promised that a Savior of the world would come through Israel, his son Judah, his son Boaz, his son David, his son Jesus of Nazareth, who suffered, died, was buried, and rose again on the third day and who will one come return to set up his eternal kingdom. God worked his loving plan of redemption out through a couple thousand years, but in Jesus he fulfilled his plan. God never fails to accomplish his loving plans of redemption.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the main point of chapter four?
2. Where was God active in this final chapter?
3. Why might the nearer redeemer have forfeited his right of redemption to Boaz?
4. What was the meaning of "drawing off a sandal?"
5. What is the significance of the blessing pronounced on Boaz by the townspeople after the redemption was confirmed?
6. What is the significance of the blessing pronounced on Naomi by the neighborhood women after the birth of the baby boy?
7. Why do you think the baby is referred to as the redeemer rather than Boaz?
8. Why do you think the book of Ruth is included in the canon of Scripture?