

Ruth # 4

Finding God=s Fingerprints on our lives

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

In the 60's, the Americans and the Russians were competing to see who can put the first man in space. The first man in space is attributed to Yuri Gagarin, a Russian cosmonaut in 1961. When he was in space he reported back to earth, and I quote, I don=t see any God up here.

In 1968 the American crew on the first manned mission to the moon radioed a different message - not that they had seen God, but that they were seeing evidence of his handiwork. The world listened while the three Apollo 8 astronauts took turns reading from Genesis, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

According to these two polarized views, *Either we are alone in the universe and no one is looking out for us or *There is a God who created this earth and who cares deeply about what goes on down here.

It would be nice to board a spacecraft and look at our own lives from above earth=s atmosphere - to be able to see the end from the beginning and how all the smaller pieces of our stories fit into the bigger story God is weaving. From the ground, there is a tendency to focus on our pain, regrets, or losses.

If Naomi had the benefit of heaven=s perspective on what was happening in her life, she would see that the painful path she was traveling was not a dead end. In fact, that God was using her suffering to equip her for the pivotal role to carry out His mission to redeem this world. Suffering doesn=t interfere with God=s purpose for Naomi. Instead, he employs her pain and confusion to deepen her relationship with him. God harnesses our sufferings and compels the bad things that happen to us to serve his good purpose.

Eugene Peterson confirms that once again we=ve gotten things backwards. We live in a time when everyone=s goal is to be perpetually healthy and constantly happy...If any one of us fails to live up to the standards that are advertised as normative, we are labeled as a problem to be solved, and a host of well-intentioned people rush to try out various cures on us... The gospel offers a different view of suffering: in suffering we enter the depths; we are at the heart of things; we are near to where Christ was on the cross.

I have to ask myself; * How can I possibly expect to know Jesus as He would want to be known if my life remains unscathed by trouble and grief. *How can I hope to grasp anything of God=s heart if I never weep over the pains of this life. * How will any of us ever learn to treasure His hesed if life was perfect? I wish I could learn these lessons vicariously, but I=m afraid that isn=t the norm for any of us.

With all that being said, lets return to the story of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth and Naomi are waiting to hear word from Boaz. Boaz is waiting at the city gate.

Verse 1 Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. City gates in Palestine were complex structures with lookout towers at the outside and a series of rooms on either side of the gateway were defenders of the town would be stationed. But these gateways also served a secondary purpose, as a gathering place for the citizens of the town. This was where the official administrative and judicial business of the community was conducted. Normally when individuals would come in from the fields and go up to the town, they would

pass right through the gate.

So Boaz went to the gate for two reasons. * The first reason is he=s hoping that the other kinsmen redeemer or Family Redeemer will pass by the gate sometime that day. * It was where court convened, and he was going to take this other kinsman to court.

Boaz sat down waited. How long? Finally the Family Redeemer ^Ajust happened[@] to pass by. And Boaz sees the man. Interestingly, he doesn=t call him by name. The author of the book keeps him anonymous. Maybe its to dismissed him as irrelevant to the central theme of the book. Some scholars nicknamed him Mr. No-Name. When Boaz calls out the NIV, NLT translates it as, My Friend. Better translation is Mr. So-and-so. Or Hey you.

2 Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses. 3 And Boaz said to the family redeemer, ^AYou know Naomi, who came back from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. Boaz had to go and round up enough elders to constitute a legal assembly. Elders were like the judges. When they all assembled and sat down, court was now in session. A jury of ten men will decide Ruth=s fate. It seems Boaz wasted no time in getting to the heart of the matter. Right away, Boaz catches readers off-guard by raising the subject of land, as opposed to the more pressing matter of who will marry Ruth. Boaz changes the first order of business from marriage to real estate.

While we may find Boaz=s tactics confusing, he knows exactly what he=s doing. He is speaking a language of these men. In an agrarian culture, a man=s land was extremely important. The text says that Naomi is selling the land. Naomi, a widow, was in no position to sell the land. According to Leviticus 25, the land of a deceased man was to be passed on to the son or brother, or uncle, there is no hint of a widow being allowed to claim the land.

What Daniel Block writes, At issue is not the transfer of ownership of property but the acquisition of the right of hold in usufruct someone else=s property until the next Jubilee Year. The word usufruct means : Usufruct is the legal right to use and derive profit or benefit from property that belongs to another person, as long as the property is not damaged. What Naomi offers is to acquire the rights of usufruct, the right to use someone=s else=s property for their benefit.

We can only speculate it appears that when Elimelech fell on hard times during the famine, he sold his land to an outsider. After the money from the sale of the land was used up, he was faced with two choices: * Sell himself into slavery or * Move to a place were food was available. In moving to Moab he chose the lesser of two evils.

Meanwhile 10 years had elapsed, it appears the land had fallen into the hands of someone outside the family. Boaz was now initiating efforts to get the land back into the family. It=s not right for the land to remain in an outsider=s hands...Levirate Law. Boaz knew that gaining the rights to the use of Naomi=s property was the key to winning the right to Ruth=s hand. Boaz challenged Mr No-Name in verse 4 to acquire the rights to Elimelech=s land in the presence of the gathered witnesses. Boaz ultimatum is simple: Look Mr. No-Name, if

you wish to exercise the right of a Kinsman- Redeemer, then act on it; but if you prefer not to, let me know, because I'm the next Kinsman in line.

Mr. No-Name assessed the situation and realized this is a good deal for him and his family, so he eagerly takes off his sandal and is ready to make the transaction.

If Ruth was watching, her heart must have sunk. You can just feel the tension in the air. Boaz does not want to lose the right to Ruth's hand. So what does he do? He pulls out his trump card. Boaz says to the Kinsman-Redeemer, "Mr. No-Name, before you take off your sandal, there is more to this deal than acquiring Elimelech's field. You are also required to marry Ruth, the Moabitess.

Verse 5 Then Boaz told him, "Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family."

What Boaz is saying to Mr. No-Name is this, The Kinsmen Redeemer would acquire the rights to Elimelech's land, but he must also assume responsibility for rescuing the line of Elimelech. He must acquire Ruth with the specific purpose of marrying her and fathering a child through her on behalf of Elimelech and his son.

That changes things dramatically.

Technically there is nothing in the levirate marriage in Deut 25 that obligated either Boaz or the Family Redeemer to marry Ruth and establish the name of Elimelech. The Mosaic law said it was the widow of the deceased man that the Family Redeemer was to marry, not the daughter-in-law. But there's a moral obligation and Boaz was appealing not to the letter of the law but to the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law is to do whatever is possible to continue the name of Elimelech. If Mr. No-Name redeems the property and not fulfill his obligations to Ruth, it would look pretty bad in the community and his reputation would be ruined.

So, if the Kinsman-Redeemer redeems Naomi's land, it would cost him considerable amount of money, but it would be worth the risk. It would be an investment that would most likely pay off in the future. But Boaz throws out his trump card and tells him that it's more than just redeeming the land, but redeeming Elimelech's name.

This now becomes high stake poker. What makes it a high-stakes gamble is the fact that Ruth has been barren for many years. There's a good chance she may never conceive. If Mr. No-Name marries her and she remains childless, the land becomes his free and clear and will be passed down to his sons. It becomes a great deal. BUT if Ruth does give birth, the kinsman-redeemer will lose money because the land will be passed down to Ruth's son, Elimelech's side of the family. His own estate would be considerably weakened and his son's inheritance will be diminished greatly. As a result, he will be forced to leave his own sons only a fraction of what he would pass on by simply keeping things as they are. Besides Elimelech's name would be passed on and not his own after he dies.

Noticed Boaz introduced Ruth as "The Moabitess". Remember there's tremendous animosity

between the Moabites and the Jews. The Kinsman-Redeemer may have pondered the ethnic implication of the transaction, that his estate might fall into the hands of one who has Moabite blood in his veins. Mr. No-Name gulped when he read the staggering price tag on marriage to Ruth.

So what does he do? He follows good decision-making logic by assessing the odds and deciding marriage to Ruth is too big of a gamble. Mr. No-Name is sensible and does what anyone would expect under the circumstances. He does not do hesed to his relative Elimelech. He refused to redeem Elimelech=s land & Ruth because the potential cost was wildly out of his price range.

This is what he says to Boaz in verse 6 AThen I can=t redeem it,@ the family redeemer replied,Abecause this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it.@

Today we have titles and deeds that are signed and notarized. Back then a transaction was sealed by removing your sandal. The Kinsman-Redeemer removed his sandal and handed it to Boaz..

Daniel Block wrote that this nonverbal gesture was performed particularly in legal contexts involving redemption & Land purchase.

Boaz said to the crowd that has now gathered around, that they are witnesses that he redeemed the land of Elimelech and that he acquired the right for Ruth to be his wife. Verse 13, So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the Lord enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. Yahweh graciously grants Ruth the ability to conceive a son. This is the narrator=s modest way of identifying a miracle. She, who has been unable to bear a child for Mahlon, has conceived for Boaz.

Ruth goes from being a foreigner// to lowest servant// to maidservant// and now to wife.

You might ask - This is a nice love story but what is the significance of it? How does this fit into God=s overall plan? I=m glad you asked

The child that Ruth gives birth to is named Obed. Who is Obed? Obed is three-fourths Gentile. He is the father of Jesse. Who is Jesse? Is the father of King David who ultimately produced the long-awaited Messiah. Look at here, A Moabite woman, great-great grandmother of King David.

Verse 16 Naomi (Nanny) took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own. And what will she teach her grandchild Obed? Obed will hear lessons of hesed - lessons learned in times of her despair. Bedtime stories of God=s faithfulness will lodge in young Obed=s heart.

He will pass Naomi=s teaching on to his son Jesse, who will one day father a son named David. Bethlehem hillside will echo with the music of a young shepherd-poet as he worships Yahweh. Surely your goodness and unfailing love (hesed) will pursue me all the days of my life. Truth passed down from one generation to the next.

17 The neighbor women said, ANow at last Naomi has a son again!@ And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. Boaz became not A Kinsman-redeemer but THE Kinsman-redeemer.

Aren=t you glad we have a Kinsman Redeemer? The Kinsman Redeemer that came from the line of Boaz, to Obed, to Jess, to the royal line of King David.

In that same small town of Bethlehem, on Christmas Day, there was a little baby born in a manger who

became our Kinsman-redeemer. Naomi and Ruth would have never expected that?

Our Kinsman Redeemer who took upon Himself our humanity. The cost factor to redeem us was far higher than we can ever fathom, but He still paid the price.

That is what redemption means, to pay a price so that the one who is redeemed is allowed to go free. To act as a kinsman-redeemer is very costly. It involves tremendous personal sacrifice.

Boaz demonstrated that to Ruth, Christ demonstrated that to the human race. Boaz who is a for runner of Jesus, was not only willing, but he wanted to redeem Ruth because of his love for her.

Christ, not only wanting but He loved us to the "emph degree", that He was willing to pay the price in order for us to be adopted as His sons and daughters.

David Atkinson, in his commentary, Message of Ruth writes this, The kinsman-redeemer has to be related to those in need, has to be able to help. He has also to be willing to sacrifice in order to do so. He is under no obligation. His act is an act of love. That is a beautiful picture of the commitment of a Kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz and Ruth aren't starting a family in the typical way we think of today. They are rescuing a family. A family who would have died out. Here=s the interesting part. Naomi is completely unaware that the whole world is counting on the baby she cradles in her arms for the fulfillment of God=s promises to redeem, to rescue His people from sin. If Christ didn't become our Kinsman-redeemer, we would have died helplessly in our own sins.

This Christmas I hope you look at it from a different perspective. At Christmas the focus is on Mary. Rightly so. Mary, a simple girl. A humble girl. A girl who was willing to submit totally to God despite the fact that she did not fully understand the full implication of bearing the Son of God. A miracle birth

But let's not forget that Ruth was a fore-runner of Mary. Ruth, a simple girl. A humble girl. A girl who was willing to submit totally to God despite the fact that she did not fully understand the full implication of bearing a son named Obed. That too, a miracle birth.

Mary is standing on the shoulders of Ruth; Mary is highly praised for her role. But Ruth is given tremendous affirmation by the other women in town in verse 15. They say to Naomi that Ruth who loves you has been better to you than seven sons.

In ancient Israel the view was that the ideal family consisted of seven sons. Because of the extraordinary character of Ruth, the women of the town, has placed Ruth more valuable to Naomi than if she had 7 sons.

No one reading the book of Ruth for the first time would ever anticipate such remarkable turn of events. Ruth is given such place of honor that she is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. A Moabite

In Summary, the book of Ruth is about spending time at ground zero - getting angry, feeling betrayed, abandoned, and forgotten. It=s about coping with unanswered prayers, and enduring countless sleepless nights filled with doubts, fears, and anxieties.

The dark night of the soul is an awful place to be, but that's where God trains his best warriors.

Although Naomi and Ruth looked and felt as if their life were being dismantled, God was actually raising them up and equipping them for a mission-critical assignment in His kingdom.

Let me remind you again, God works the midnight shifts. He is working in your life even when you are asleep, or unaware, or feeling as if you have been forgotten. He is in the midst of weaving together all the pain, all the tragedies, all the sorrow, to bring about his purpose and will for your life. I know it's hard to see, we worship a God who does the impossible.

Quote from Carolyn James, The birth of Obed is a picture of the gospel - suffering and sacrifice, the joy of renewed life, and hope for the future all mingled together. This is the Gospel of Ruth.

Postscript: The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

Resource materials:

Carolyn Custis James, The Gospel of Ruth, Zondervan, 2008

Daniel Block, The New American Commentary, B & H Publishing Group 1998

J.A. Motyer, The Message of Ruth, Inter-Varsity Press, 1983

