

Sovereign Love

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[0 : 00] Even though we wouldn't want to admit it too loudly, especially the men folk among us, everyone enjoys a good love story, especially one that ends well.

Perhaps that's one reason we're drawn to the book of Ruth. Among many other things, it is a dramatic love story between a foreign widow called Ruth and a Jewish man called Boaz. It's got everything, twists in the road, obstacles in the path, and a juicy romance. It's also got the best of endings. The book of Ruth is a wonderful love story set like a shining star immediately after the frankly depressing book of Judges.

But the deeper question is this, between whom is this a love story? Between whom is this a love story? On the surface, of course, it's between Boaz and Ruth.

But digging deeper and taking the whole story of the Bible into account, it's actually a story of the sovereign love of God for His church.

[1 : 14] It's the story of God's loving pursuit of people lost in sin and desperately needing salvation. The book of Ruth is a picture of God's amazing love for us.

We've already traveled a fair distance, but now at the end of this book, for fair or foul, things come to a head. And the very last word of the book tells us where the whole story's been pointing.

The very last word of the book. David. However, I want us to consider this chapter not so much in terms of the love between Boaz and Ruth, but that between God and His church.

And that in three stages. The sovereign love of God in His redemption. The sovereign love of God in His purposes. And the sovereign love of God in His promises.

Sovereign love of God in His redemption. In His purposes and promises. So first of all, from verse 1 through 12, we have the sovereign love of God in His redemption.

[2 : 26] In His redemption. The events of verses 1 to 12 take place in a culture, time, and place very different from ours. And yet the beauty of it still remains.

Boaz, determined to marry Ruth, wastes no time in making his promise good to her. As soon as it's morning, he goes to the gate of Bethlehem.

The gate of a community, so called, was in those days the equivalent of the council chamber in ours. All the most important people sat there.

All the most important decisions were made there. And at that gate sat the closer relative who had the immediate responsibility to redeem Ruth. To marry her.

And to continue Naomi's family line. So Boaz begins to lodge his appeal. Naomi, verse 3, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech.

[3 : 29] So I thought I'd 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 beside you to redeem it.

And I come after you. So Boaz is no fool. Naomi owns a small parcel of land which had belonged to her dead husband. It's an attractive proposition, so the man agrees to buy it.

But along with the land goes Ruth. In the culture of the day, Ruth became as much the property of this man as Naomi.

Ruth became the property of this man as much as the land itself. Now we find this very distasteful, but this is just the way it was. So the man gets the land, but as the second prize, the last prize, he also gets Ruth.

Given how virtuous Ruth was, surely this shouldn't have been too much of a problem. But in the culture of the day, the reason for this transaction was the continuance of the name of Elimelech.

[4 : 39] So any children that were produced by the union between this man and Ruth would not continue that man's name, but the name of Elimelech.

So for that reason, the loss of his own name and family line, the man changes his mind. Clever Boaz. He's lured the man in, but he's now delivered that little bit of information which makes the transaction unpalatable.

So the man changes his mind and says, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. After all, in that culture, a man's name is all that he is, and it's to be fiercely guarded. The door is now wide open for Boaz. He says, the man says, take my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it. And there follows an old Jewish custom of redemption where it's attested, signified by the exchange of a sandal.

I guess it's similar to a deal being struck today by spitting into your hand and shaking on it, right? Boaz then makes the formal agreement with those who are sitting at the gate.

[5 : 52] He buys the field, and along with it, Ruth. And he calls those who are sitting there to be his witnesses. Boaz pays the redemption price so he can marry Ruth.

He loves her so much that he's happy for his own family name to disappear, which in reality doesn't happen. He pays the price and bears the cost. Everything is done officially and formally with the elders agreeing to Boaz's redemption of Ruth.

Why did Boaz do all these things? Was it because he wanted a bit more land to add to his portfolio? Was it because he wanted a seat at the gate of the elders?

Was it because he wanted a concubine? Why did Boaz pay such a heavy price and ensure that the whole deal was done publicly? Why did he expose himself to potential humiliation?

He did it for one reason. He loved Ruth. He loved her with every fiber of his being, and he could not bear the thought of her being with another man.

[7 : 04] What drove him to such lengths for Ruth was that he loved her. And then we see Jesus, of whom it was written in Ephesians 5, verse 25, Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

The redemption of Ruth is but a shadow picture of the redemption of the church. Boaz gave his sandal to redeem Ruth. Jesus gave himself to redeem us.

We were once far off from God. We were sinners by nature and enemies of his holiness. There was nothing lovable about us, nothing to draw God to us, but he loved us.

The love of Boaz for Ruth is but a grain of sand compared to the infinite love of God for a sinful people.

The love of God is his steadfast, unchanging commitment to his people, his unconditional kindness and compassion for us. Here we see the heart of God for a people trapped in sin and condemned to judgment.

[8 : 19] As Paul will later say, God demonstrated his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For whom did God demonstrate his love?

Not the righteous, not the morally upright, but for sinners. His endless, steadfast, unchanging love. The love of God for sinners lay behind and motivated his gift of Jesus, the Christ of whom it is spoken in Ephesians 5 as loving the church.

God gave him to be our redeemer. Even as Boaz was Ruth's redeemer, so Jesus Christ is ours. He redeemed us.

He paid the ransom price. It didn't cost him a sandal. It cost him his lifeblood. The transaction took place not in the city gates of Bethlehem, but on a Roman cross outside the city of Jerusalem.

[9 : 21] For there, Jesus gave himself as a ransom for us to buy us back from sin and death, to redeem us unto God and to give us life eternal in, through, and with him.

The cost wasn't a sandal. The cost was his blood, the blood that poured from the head and hands of our Lord. The cost wasn't a shoe, but the life of the man who was God in the flesh.

The Apostle Paul would say, in him, Jesus, we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.

So, verses 1 to 12 here foreshadowed the greatest redemption event in history. The Lord Jesus Christ paying the price of our sin and freeing us from slavery to death and destruction.

The great-grandson of Boaz, many times removed, bought our freedom with his own blood.

Redemption, you see, flows in the bloodline of Jesus.

[10 : 28] Boaz was the first, but Jesus was the greatest. How do we respond to God's love for us expressed in Christ's blood shed for our redemption?

How do we respond? In 1 Corinthians 6, verse 20, in the context of how the Christian must abstain from any kind of sexual immorality, the Apostle Paul writes these words.

He says, You are not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify God with your body. We have been bought at the price of Christ's precious blood.

We are not our own to do with as we like. We belong to Him. Therefore, we are to honor Him with everything we are, everything we have, and everything we hope to be.

In what ways are we honoring God for His sovereign love of redemption through Christ's blood? Are there areas of our lives where we need to repent of not living for God, but of living for ourselves, of fulfilling our desires and not His?

[11 : 38] Are we factoring God into our finances, our relationships, our ambitions, our choice of career, our use of time? How does the truth that because of God's sovereign love in redeeming us with the blood of His Son, how does that change our priorities?

my suspicion is that when it comes to the decisions we make in life, God doesn't get much of a look in, especially if putting them first will inconvenience us, cost us, or spoil our pleasures.

over the next few days, let each of us prayerfully consider how we are expressing our gratitude for Christ's redeeming blood and God's sovereign love.

At the very least, surely it deserves our faith in Him. Sovereign love of God and His redemption.

Then from verse 13 through 17, we have the sovereign love of God in His purposes.

In His purposes. Though it's only composed of four chapters, the book of Ruth is a rollercoaster of emotions. It begins with a family of six. Soon after, the six are reduced to two, Naomi and Ruth, both of whom become economic migrants.

[13 : 03] Naomi is filled with grief and she changes her name from Naomi to Mara. Naomi means gentle or pleasant. Mara means bitter.

As far as Naomi is concerned, her life has become bitter to her. Her and her daughter-in-law are poor and they're very much alone in the world. The book of Ruth ends with another family.

Naomi, Boaz, Ruth, and their child, Obed. For all the ten years Ruth was married to Naomi's son, she didn't have a child.

But within a short space of time, Ruth and Boaz being married, the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. The birth of the child restored Naomi's life and nourished her in old age.

She is dearly loved and she takes the child, verse 16, and she takes the child, she lays him on her lap and she becomes his nurse. You can almost see the contented smile on Naomi's face as she looks lovingly into the face of the baby sleeping in her arms.

[14 : 17] The whole rollercoaster of Ruth's life over the past few months have been one event followed by another, the kind of events we might think of as being coincidences.

But as we've repeatedly seen through this series, the sovereign love of God for His people means that there are no coincidences. It is God who brought Naomi and Ruth back to Bethlehem.

It is God who directed Ruth to glean in the fields of Boaz. It is God who was superintending all the details in the lives of these two women. His hand is unseen, His love is unknown, but surely as Ruth and Boaz look back in hindsight at all the events, they can see God's hand and love in His purposes for them.

How else will a widow girl from Moab and a righteous man from Bethlehem get together unless God's at work? The sovereign love of God and His purposes of salvation is beautifully portrayed in this book.

This is the God, the God whose hand we cannot see in the changing circumstances of our lives and whose love we don't understand when the times are tough.

[15 : 43] But the God who is working His purpose out for us just as surely as He did for Naomi, for Ruth, and for Boaz. So put yourself in Ruth's shoes.

that first day she went out to glean in the fields of Bethlehem. She must have been uncertain and afraid. Put yourself in Naomi's shoes as she returned a widow from Moab to her husband's hometown.

She's bitter and she's hungry. If we'd asked them back in chapter 1, do you believe that God is working out His good purposes for you and all you're going through? They might well have laughed us to scorn.

But He was. Even in the uncertainty, fear, bitterness, and hunger, God was still in sovereign control and in love He was working out His gracious purposes for them.

Now I'd love to assure each one here that all our endings in this life will be as happy for us as they were for Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth. That we'll all live happily ever after.

[16:48] I can't because in this life we're not promised happiness, we are promised trouble. What I can assure you is that though in this life there may be no happy endings, ultimately we're assured of a better future where God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there shall be no more suffering, no more pain, no more bitterness, and no more hunger.

That's something to hope for, is it not? In fact, that hope of eternal life is what sustains and fosters true Christian endurance in the sufferings of this life.

Alistair Begg is a very gifted Scottish preacher who now ministers in America and he once said these words, he said, we cannot trace God's hand but we can trust God's heart.

We cannot trace God's hand but we can trust God's heart. We can't always see God's hand at work, especially in the difficulties, when depression strikes or when loneliness crushes but we can always trust the heart of God.

He loves us dearly and deeply. His grace will always be sufficient for us and He will never leave us. Begg's wonderful words there are a result of a lifetime of Christian experience for it's only as we look back on those sufferings we have endured and we've seen how God has helped us in and through them, we can begin to testify to the loving heart of God for us.

[18:30] So perhaps tonight there are some of us here who are struggling with difficulties and you can't trace God's hand in your spiritual famine, whatever that might be, you can't trace it.

But take this on board from the book of Ruth. Whatever may happen, whether the pain gets worse before it gets better or whether you're just going to have to learn how to cope with the pain until God takes you home to be with Himself, you can always trust God's loving heart.

Now we all know Christians who are struggling right now. If we want to be true friends to them, having patiently listened to them, we will never ever try to second guess God's purposes for them. But what we will do is if we have acceptance and time, gently remind them that God's heart is filled with love toward them.

We'll mourn with them, we'll pray with them, we'll be present with them for as long as it takes, but all the time we'll witness to the cross of Christ where God demonstrated His sovereign love for us.

[19:53] Think in your mind tonight, is there someone I can do this for? Someone who really needs to hear this? Or let's pray for God to guide us to someone with whom we can share the message of Ruth and the sovereign love of God in His purposes of grace.

The sovereign love of God in His purposes. Well then, finally tonight, from verse 18 to 22, we have the sovereign love of God in His promises, in His promises.

Ruth chapter 4 draws together the great themes of the whole book. God's redemption of His people, God's sovereign purposes for His people, and God's sovereign promises to His people. The book of Ruth finds its climax and meaning in the very last word, David. Most Bible books begin with a genealogy, a family tree, but in verses 18 through 22, Ruth ends with a family tree, placing David in a solid line reaching back to Peretz, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham.

It's not the same here in the city, but in other parts of the country and world, family trees are very important. In my home village in the north, conversations usually center on who is related to who.

[21:23] So the common question you ask when you meet a stranger is, of what people are you? My family all laugh at me when I ask that. Of what people are you? Family history is important because it establishes someone standing in the community.

Jewish culture depended upon who you are in relation to the community, so of what people are you was important in establishing whether you belonged or not.

The prophet Samuel, the author of the book of Ruth, wants us to understand where David, the greatest king of Israel, fitted into the line of Peretz and Boaz.

He wants to establish beyond doubt that David belongs to the community of Israel and especially to that of Bethlehem. He wants us to know of what people David is and therefore that he belongs.

It's like he's saying to his readers, don't you know that this David, the king, he's the great grandson of Boaz and Ruth. Samuel wrote this book during the conflict between King Saul and David.

[22:40] So by concluding with this family tree, he's defending David's right to be the true king of Israel. He's showing where David comes from and of what people he is. And he's doing it to assure the people of Israel that David, not Saul, is the true king of Israel.

Old Testament scholars talk about the book of Ruth as an apologetic for the kingship of Israel. As an apologetic for the kingship of David rather.

A defense of David's right to be the king of Israel so that the people of Israel would not rebel against him but follow him and fight for him. Now what Samuel didn't know was the greater significance of this family line.

For 28 generations after David was born in the very same Bethlehem in which the story of Ruth is based, a child would be born who wouldn't be just the king of Israel but the king of the world. Who knows but the stable in which Jesus was born may well be built in the time of Ruth by some of Boaz's laborers. We don't know.

[23 : 52] But what we do know is that the blood of both Boaz's, this true Israelite, and Ruth, this Moabitess, ran in the veins of our Lord.

Jesus, the seed of Boaz's and Ruth, the seed of David, the seed of Abraham, born to fulfill the promise God had made to Abraham so many years before that through his seed, the whole world to be blessed.

It took God thousands of years working patiently in generation after generation but finally God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, the father of the faithful, that through his descendant salvation would come to peoples from every nation on earth.

So this genealogy at the end of Ruth points us forward to Jesus Christ who was at the line of David. Chapter 4 has already described redemption but now it ends by pointing to the Redeemer through whom God's loving purposes for the world shall be fulfilled.

Through Jesus Christ born of the line of Boaz's and Ruth and his death upon the cross, redemption and salvation shall come not just to those of Jewish descent but to outsiders like Ruth and like us.

[25 : 16] God's love shall be poured out on the cross as Jesus' blood, that blood made up of the DNA of Boaz's and Ruth pours forth like a cascading waterfall.

So ultimately the book of Ruth isn't just a love story between Boaz's and Ruth. In an altogether greater way it's a love story between God and his church.

And it's a story into which God is calling each of us to enter by faith in the descendant of Boaz's and Ruth, Jesus Christ. The moment we believe and trust in Jesus all the blessings of the redemption and salvation he has won on the cross become ours.

We become his. In a world which is so filled with hatred today is this not the best of all news that the sovereign God of heaven and earth loves us this way?

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