

Business Transacted at Bethlehem's Gate

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Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 0 0] Well now let's turn to the book of Ruth and to chapter 4 and we're going to focus our attention on verses 1 to 6.

And we may just read these verses. Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there and behold the near kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, Come aside friend, sit down here.

So he came aside and sat down. And he, that is Boaz, took ten men of the elders of the city and said, Sit down here. So they sat down. Then he said to the near kinsman, Naomi who has come back from the country of Moab sold a piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.

And I thought to inform you saying, Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it.

But if you will not redeem it, then tell me that I may know. For there is no one but you to redeem it. And I am next after you.

[1 : 2 1] And he said, I will redeem it. Then Boaz said, On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance.

And the near kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.

We are entitling this, Business Transacted at Bethlehem's Gate. Business Transacted at Bethlehem's Gate.

And the thrust of this is, the business is transacted decently and in order. Now in the previous study, we left Ruth, so to speak, at home with Naomi, waiting upon the Lord.

Waiting upon his will to become clear. Waiting in hope and prayer that Boaz would settle this business of who would redeem Naomi's land and who would also take on this solemn business of effectively marrying Ruth the Moabitess to raise up a family in honour of her dead husband.

[2 : 5 7] That was the custom, that was the way of it. That was acting as the kinsman redeemer, the goel, as we have already noted.

And the scene here that we are looking at this evening is at the main entrance to Bethlehem. And what we see at the gate is Boaz.

And Boaz is there with the closer relative of Naomi and Ruth and ten elders. And Boaz's concern here is to get the business dealt with, but to do it in a way that is decent and orderly.

This is effectively a God-honouring approach to how we conduct ourselves. It's interesting that Paul, separated by many, many centuries from Boaz, Paul in dealing with the whole context of worship, you'll find it in 1 Corinthians 14, applies the principles of decency and order to worship.

And we might say just on the way by this, I think the church in the 21st century needs to revisit that whole subject of what constitutes decent and orderly worship.

- [4 : 26] The principles of doing the thing decently and in order. And we see that Boaz himself is determined to settle this business that has fallen upon him.
- Ruth has pleaded with him, we saw that, to act and to act with haste to resolve these issues and in order to see that the right things were done.
- And we read there in the passage, there was the purchase of the land that had gone out of the family, that had to be dealt with, redeeming of the land, and also, and particularly, what would happen with Ruth, whose wife would she become.
- And so I want us just to focus on two things, but within those we'll look at one or two points on the way. First of all, I want us to notice and seek to apply this, how the business attended to was decently done.
- First of all, we want to notice that what Boaz did, he did within the framework of the law of God. And we emphasize again and again that the Lord's people are not saved through law-keeping, they're saved to law-keeping.
- [5 : 56] We're under the law to Christ. The law of God, that is, is the framework within which we operate. And we do things decently and in order, consistent with that law.
- And so Boaz sets himself about this business. And we notice that he did act speedily, he wasted no time.
- He gave the matter urgent attention. Naomi had said, you remember when we looked at this last, Naomi had said to Ruth, Sit still, my daughter, and wait.
- The man will finish this matter. She was confident that Boaz, being the man of God he was, would see to things, he would act hastily, he would deal with the matter promptly.
- And there are times in the life of the Lord's people when we are to make haste, we are to act quickly, yes or times to wait.
- [7 : 09] And we saw last time that Ruth wasn't of that nature, that she hung around doing nothing. And we saw that the waiting that was expected of her was an activity.
- It wasn't slow. But she found it hard just to contain herself and to be at peace and to wait prayerfully on the will of God. There are times when that's appropriate.
- Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, says the psalmist, Psalm 37. But there are also times for haste, make haste.
- The classic make haste must be. When Jesus, you remember, on one occasion went down into Jericho and the crowds came flocking to see Jesus.
- And there was a wee chap, you remember, called Zacchaeus, the tax collector. And he thought, well, I have no chance, so I'm up into this sycamore tree. And he went down and he lay on one of these low branches.
- [8 : 18] I wonder, has anybody been to Jericho here? Well, if you haven't, in the middle of Jericho today, modern Jericho, there's a great tree.
- It takes a few folks to go around it with their arms outstretched. It's painted white on the bottom of it to keep the insects from going up it. And the branches are just like what we're looking at here on this low roof.
- And they're really low. They dip down and it's a fair old chunk of a tree. And it's easy to picture little Zacchaeus up on one of those great big stocky branches in order to see Jesus.
- And what did Jesus say to him when he came to him? Zacchaeus, make haste come down. For today I must abide at your house.
- And it was clear, you find it in Luke 19 by the way, verse 5 following, you find that there was time for haste there. This was an important day in the life of Zacchaeus, the most important day of his life on earth.

[9 : 27] It was the day that he met with his saviour. And there was an appropriateness about haste. And I think just moving on in this vein for a moment, we can see that as something that we want to urge upon people.

There's an appropriateness about it. There's a rightness to encourage them to make haste. The important business of the now of salvation, we're not to be leaving it off imagining that there's tomorrow.

it's not the manana approach, it's today, it's the now. It's to be about this business with urgency. And if we're spared to the next day, then we use that day the same way.

But to return to Boaz, haste was appropriate for him on this occasion. And he wasted no time, but was early at the gate of Bethlehem.

When we say the gate, it's really the square, but the square was towards the main gate of the city. It was a place where business was transacted and where legal matters were settled, were dealt with and settled.

[10 : 49] And although it isn't mentioned specifically in so many words, it seems to me legitimate here to understand that Boaz must have requested that the nearer kinsman than himself, the nearer relative than himself, should be there that morning too.

It's not stretching the thing at all too far. He was there. I don't think Boaz was just going to take a chance and having made haste to get there himself and to get the elders organized, he wasn't going to leave it to chance so to speak that the man, the nearer relative, would turn up.

No, it's not said in so many words but the man must have been informed that Boaz wanted to meet him at the gate.

And so we find there in verse 1, Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there and behold the near kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken came by.

I like that there, the nearer, behold, it's like really, have a look at that, how about that, consider, prayer answered, he's here, he's calm.

[12 : 10] And so once he is in place, Boaz then proceeds to get the elders into this business.

Boaz is concerned to move the thing on, to take hold of the opportunity that's given and to act decently, yes, but speedily too, with haste.

The time has come, all things are now ready and he's going for it. And as we think about Boaz endeavouring to redeem Ruth and to settle the matter and making haste to it.

I think it's worth in the whole concept of redeeming here, pushing this a little further, or rather lifting it on to the higher level and to think about the importance of making haste to receive the redemption that is purchased by Christ for sinners.

We're receiving a package, aren't we? Say that reverently, but we're receiving something that's complete, something that Christ has accomplished.

[13 : 27] I don't know if anybody's read Professor Murray's little book Redemption, accomplished and applied, but it's a peach, or a gem, it's perhaps more fitting.

Read it, read it, read it, read it. It's an absolute cracker. It's so helpful and so precise and it is simply called redemption accomplished and applied.

Christ coming, Christ suffering, Christ's death on Calvary, the nature of that death at this level is that he buys us out from under the liabilities we have the curse of the broken law and his death secures those redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the lamb, so to speak, his purchased possession.

and just as in the lesser matter of redeeming Naomi's property and Ruth too, there is this great business that we should make haste to, to ensure that we have received the redemption purchased by Christ.

And if we have received it, to share it with others, to tell them of this great business. I've said this to you before and I'll bear saying again, we need to work at being clear at how to communicate this.

[15 : 07] I'm always challenged, I can say this honestly, I'm always challenged to find down a presentation to folk that don't really know the business like we know it.

They're not under the teaching, they have next to no background and I was caught again there on Friday evening talking to a couple of young girls that had come with their mother just in how to find down to make understandable the important business that Christ has come for.

And it's important for us to have ways of doing that to think the thing through. This is not an apology, it's an explanation.

Why do I often quote gospel hymns? Well the answer is because they're just that, the gospel's in them. It's simply put, it helps us to see in a simple and clear way what Christ has done for sinners and tap into these things, memorize them, use them, meditate on them, especially when they're clearly based on the Bible, so that we can make haste to share the good news with others in order that by God's grace they may turn to the Saviour.

Well he made haste and there was a place for that. But we see also that he acted with persistence. He will finish the business before the day is over.

[16 : 59] And I'm thinking here when I say persistence, not in an irritating type of persistence, a nagging approach, a negative attitude, but in a really positive way he gave diligence to settling this business on the day.

And scripture commends this. Scripture commends to us the value, the benefit, the rightness of being persistent and in the sense here moving into diligence, giving our earnest attention to the business.

The Bible commends it as the opposite of sloth and laziness. The soul of the sluggard says the Bible desires but does nothing.

But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich or as the NIV has it very usefully shall be fully satisfied.

Proverbs 13 verse 4. The word of God I say commends this kind of persistence in seeking to obtain the good.

[18 : 15] We sing quite often in Psalm 34 depart from ill or evil, do good, seek peace, pursue it earnestly, give yourself to it.

Strain every nerve in that direction. Jesus himself tells us as he told those who heard him in the days of his flesh, don't just seek and not find and leave it there, knock once and that's the end of it, ask once and that's enough.

No, he says keep on, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, keep on asking. Persist.

Persist. Give diligence to it, stay at it and if you're like me here tonight, the Lord's probably speaking to you pretty directly. we need to persist in the good way, we need to give diligence and not give up, not be faint hearted and turn back.

Remember there's a passage there in Jeremiah chapter 12 where he was feeling he'd had enough and the Lord came to him and said to him if the horsemen wear you how shall you contend with the swellings of Jordan?

[19 : 50] How shall you cope with what's more difficult? How shall you cope with the great difficulties that are coming and in Jeremiah's case they came? There's something here too in Boaz.

He gives himself in this way. He persists. He keeps on. He aims to finish the business. And as regards our own salvation, as regards our relationship with the Lord, assurance that we were thinking about earlier today, we're to keep on asking him.

He knows how to give us that assurance. There's no one else who can give it to us. He can. And if somebody says something to you that brings it, it's only because the Lord has given it.

The Father knows how to give the good. Paul tells us in the same vein about persistence, run that you may obtain.

The writer to the Hebrews says, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run.

[21 : 08] The race with patience. In other words, persist, give diligence, keep going, get the business in hand and get going with it.

It may be difficult. Paul uses that image to the Corinthians of the athlete trimming down, not like me carrying too much, but trimming down so he's really fit and he goes for it.

And the writer of the Hebrews put all the weights aside, everything that entangles you, everything that will weigh you down, and run the race with patience looking unto Jesus.

Give diligence, persist in the matter. And Boaz exemplifies that in doing things decently.

And one last thought within this first point, and that is he applies himself righteously. He does things the right way. He does them in an open and honest and guileless way.

[22 : 27] There's no deceit about it. Bear with me here as I just dwell on this for a few moments because he looks at how the business is going to be conducted and he gets the nearer relative than himself, he gets him there and he gets ten elders there too.

Now we've already noticed that Boaz was quite a significant character in the Bethlehem community. Commentators differ over whether he was a big farmer or a big, big farmer.

Well, to me, he was a big farmer. He was wealthy enough. He was a person of substance and importance in the community and doubtless. He could have used means other than right means but he acted righteously.

He did things the straight way, the honest way. No short circuiting the thing, no quick fix about it. He'll do it in a way that heaven will approve of.

Yes, he eagerly desired the result, no doubt about that. It was already apparent he wanted to be the kinsman redeemer to Ruth.

[23 : 51] He wanted to marry her. But he goes for it in an upright way. He does it in keeping with the word of God.

And I think we need to remind ourselves at a practical level. You see, it's all too easy for us to take advantage of a situation by our wits or whatever.

Boaz could have because of his superior standing in the community. It's possible for us to do that in the church. Indeed, I dare say, if you look hard enough, you'll see it done in the church, where people take advantage of their standing.

People take advantage denominationally or congregationally because of their standing. And we have to watch out for that.

We have to be straight in our dealings. Some people take advantage of their ability compared with others. They're advanced in knowledge and it becomes a means of achieving the goal in a slick, quick and not so straight way.

[25 : 04] The Christian believer is to act within the framework of the word of God and do the thing in a way that's right. If the Lord leads us in the path of righteousness, then our standards need to be right.

And short term success by doubtful means or methods will ultimately make us losers. Let's learn even from Boas to hold fast the standards of what we might call biblical decency when seeking to achieve goals in life and in service.

And the second and final point in this, we said decently and then finally the business attended to endured. We've been anticipating this a little I know but let's focus in on it.

Boas makes sure that the business was transacted in the appropriate place with the elders in the market square at the gate of Bethlehem.

That's the place the business should have been carried out at and that's the place he would be. There were protocols to be attended to.

[26 : 36] In those days in Israel, they were to be observed regarding redemption and Boas showed his regard not just for God though that's true but for man as well to do things the right way in an ordered way.

No shady dealing, no dark deeds wrought in secret but open in the public place and in the public meeting. This is where serious business had to be conducted and would be conducted.

And you see here again, we find the caliber of the man. He had regard for what was just and true. We noticed the straightness of his dealings.

And this is for us too. We learn from him to apply ourselves in a way that is just and true. Remember what I said a moment ago, short-term solutions by dubious means don't equal success, ultimate success.

And the history of the church itself is writ large with great and grievous mistakes made on that kind of approach.

[27 : 56] After and all, you see, Boas has nothing to hide here. He has therefore nothing to fear from public scrutiny.

It's straightforward in his mind. He can trust God without can, and he'll go for it where it ought to be dealt with. And it seems to me at a practical level in applying this to ourselves, if we seek by God's grace to serve him in our daily conduct, then we should live lives that are transparent.

They're honest, they're guileless, they're open, they're open to inspection. That's what comes through about Boas here.

It would have been oh so easy to do some shady deal, but that's not the way he did it. And he commends that approach to us.

He commends it to us. Do it in a way that's ordered and right. Be transparent. Be honest, be guileless.

[29 : 10] Jesus commended, didn't he, Nathaniel's guilelessness. He was transparent. There was no Jacob in him. and we see secondly within his head how he went to this extent Boas, he sought out the wise and sound advice of the elders.

He drafted ten of them. He took ten men of the elders, not all of them, ten of them, and he said, sit down here.

So they sat down. So he said to the near kinsman of Naomi, he told the story. But you see, he sought the advice, he sought the balanced judgment of these experienced council members.

He wanted justice to be done. He wanted a fair outcome. He wanted difficulties and any uncertainty on the matter dealt with in an open and public way.

That's what these folks met for at the gate, as we have said already. They were people who dealt with controversies and with difficult questions, with apportioning land and so on, and with other legal questions.

[30 : 41] And they were bound themselves under the law of God to give justice to all irrespective of their standing in the community. In fact, the prophets, especially the minor prophets later on, hammered people who had power for depriving the widows and the fatherless and the poor of justice.

They were a soft touch, it was easy to do. They couldn't defend themselves. And the minor prophets under God were raised up, and the major prophets too, but the minor prophets again and again called the leaders, those who administer justice, to consider their ways, to recognize the perverse judgment they were guilty of.

And so these men were called upon to exercise sound and balanced judgment and to come to conclusions that would move this matter on as regards the redemption of Naomi's property and Ruth, the Moabitess.

Now, perhaps we can draw one practical lesson from this on the way by. I can't remember the proverb, but I remember, I mean I can't remember chapter and verse.

there is a proverb that says something like that the grey head is a symbol of wisdom in the Bible, but it doesn't follow that wisdom always is in a grey head, because that's not that simple.

[32 : 27] But maturity, the years passing, the experience gained, ought in the realm of things to give people a bit more wisdom.

But these men were schooled in the business and they were to give good, sound, solid, fair advice in the light of the law of God.

That was the framework they operated in. And that's the framework we are to operate in too. No shifting and shilly shallying, but sticking to the principles of the word of God.

And I think it's important to say that because even good and godly men can sometimes give bad advice. There's an incident in the, it's in 1st Kings chapter, escapes my memory just now, but it has to do with a not at all well known prophet whom the Lord sent to rebuke the evil king.

And he was warned not to speak to anyone on the way home, not to be deflected from duty's path. And he succumbed, he was wooed and lured by another prophet, and he died on that account.

[33 : 58] He was given bad advice by a prophet, and it cost him his life. The important thing here is to notice that we weigh the advice we're given in relation to the word of God, that it can be substantiated by the word of God.

Of course sometimes a bad advice is given unintentionally, and it's important therefore for us to use the touchstone of scripture in weighing this decision or that.

Let's remember here the importance of weighing the thing wisely, and therefore of asking God for wisdom.

True wisdom, where the Bible tells us, comes down from above, from the Father of lights. It's a good and perfect gift. He provides it. Give me wisdom, that I might understand your law, that I may be able to apply its principles day by day.

The Apostle Paul, centuries on, says, prays that the Ephesians be filled with wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

[35 : 20] He prays that for that they may be filled with wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. We read that and we pass it by.

We don't think really about what he's saying. He prays for them to receive wisdom, to be filled with wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

And if he prayed that for them, we need to pray it too. we need to pray that we will be filled with wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God so that when we're up against difficult issues, we will have the mind of God in the matter.

The wisdom of this world is not to be compared with the wisdom that comes from God. and if you want a proof of that, the wisdom of this world crucified Jesus.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that if the rulers of this world had known, really known, who they were crucifying, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

[36 : 48] Their wisdom that they applied, was wholly inadequate. And we need wisdom from God.

Wisdom that comes to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says again, just a photo from that Corinthian passage, Christ is made to us who believe wisdom from God.

Wisdom is found in Him. when we need sound advice, when we need sound advice, and it's given to us by Christian friends, we're still unclear on how we should apply ourselves in this or that situation, we go to Him and we ask Him for more light on the way, more wisdom in the matter.

sound advice from Him. Well, in concluding this study, let's observe how Boaz conducted this business at the gate.

one last subheading to think about before we finish, how discreet he was and how prudent he was. We've seen enough of Boaz already at the gate to know that he was not reckless in his haste to conclude the business, though he was eager to get the thing sorted.

[38 : 18] We know he was very desirous to know who would actually redeem Naomi's property and Ruth. But we see him for all his urgency.

We see him discreet in it. He met per arrangement with the other relative and the elders and he greets this relative.

Go back there just to the beginning of verse 1. He says, Boaz says to the near relative, come aside friend. Now, if you've got a margin in your Bible or a footnoting in your Bible, you'll notice that the Hebrew says, Peloni Almoni.

Not friend, but Peloni Almoni. It's a most interesting expression and it says here literally so and so.

That's not really enough. Because as the Hebraeus have noticed very rightly, when he greeted him, Peloni Almoni, it wasn't just come here over here my friend or so and so.

[39 : 34] You've got the discreetness with which Boaz operated here. He, as somebody has said and Hebraeus says, Peloni distinguishes him, Almoni conceals his identity.

He doesn't name it. He's discreet about it. We can't tell what his name was. There's a deliberateness about this.

He gives the man an exact summary of the situation and places upon him the responsibility of making his mind up. What are you going to do? Are you going to redeem?

And it is clear once he knows the whole of the matter, the near kinsman said, verse 6, I cannot redeem.

So you redeem for yourself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. So he says, well, hearing the whole of the matter, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance.

[40 : 48] In other words, what he means is, I can't afford to take Ruth on and marry her, or I'll really scupper my own inheritance arrangements.

So he simply says no. And here the door is opened for Boaz. He achieves his desire and his goal by doing things decently and in order.

And if you think about it, that's the way God himself is. God does things in a totally and utterly decent way, in an ordered way.

It's interesting that years later, the great grandson of Boaz and Ruth said, The Lord has established my kingdom.

The Lord has made a covenant with me, ordered in all things and sure. And he is all my salvation.

[42 : 02] David knew, king of Israel knew, God didn't leave anything just to fall out.

It was all ordered and shown. Then, within the framework of his own nature, of his own law, and he bids us to see this, and to learn from it, and to take it to heart.

Let's seek to conduct ourselves, by the grace of God, in ways that are right, as those who would follow Jesus. Did you notice the concluding part of what we read in Ephesians?

Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. See that you walk, that is, that you conduct yourself, circumspectly, in a decent, and in an ordered way.

There it is, verse 15. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, making haste for the days are even.

[43 : 19] Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And may that be true of each of us tonight, wherever we are in our experience, understand what the will of the Lord is for you, friend.

Ask him to give you understanding and to apply his word. And it may be that in your own context, and with the things that concern you, you'll be able to say with Boaz, the Lord granted me my heart's wish and fulfilled my thoughts and counsel.

Amen.