

God's Redeeming Kindness

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Date: 28 November 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, let's start. In the early years of being married to Michelle, I forgot our anniversary once or twice. Okay, it was three times in a row, all right?

But after the third time, I tried to redeem myself. We were still living in Sydney at the time, so I bought a season pass to the ballet at the Sydney Opera House, which consisted of three shows, one for each anniversary I forgot.

Not bad, hey? I was pretty proud of myself, actually. Until the first show, when I fell asleep during it. And then I had to redeem myself for that, too. The point of the story is to redeem requires a cost, a price.

That's what redemption means, to buy back or to pay a price in order to save. In my case, it was to pay for three ballet shows in order to save face, save myself.

But it can be to pay a price in order to save someone else, of course, someone else's land, or another person's life from being empty life.

[1 : 06] We're going to see both of those today in our chapter, which is all about redemption. In fact, the word redeem comes up nine times in our chapter. I've bolded them on your sheets, just so you can see it at a glance.

And that's more than double any other chapter in Ruth. And so the big idea of the passage is redemption. But it begins with the word meanwhile, because we're in the middle of an exciting story, as Graham said.

So let me, given that it's the last week, let me quickly recap the story so far. In chapter one, we heard how Naomi went away full and came back empty. Then in chapter two, we saw God's kindness working behind the scenes with all those coincidences, or perhaps better named God incidences, to connect Ruth with Boaz.

And then last week in chapter three, seeing God's kindness led Naomi to make that risky plan to find rest for Ruth.

But remember, Ruth went further and told Boaz to propose to her. Some guys are just too slow off the mark. And remember, the proposal was to spread the corner of his garment over her, the corner of his garment or wing over her, like Christian showed us at their wedding.

[2 : 31] In fact, I was talking with a friend a while ago who said he was catching the train into work one day when a lady sat down on the seat next to him. The corner of her coat fell across his leg.

And he wondered, had she been reading Ruth? But Naomi's plan and Ruth's request were both based on seeing God's sovereign work in providing Boaz and God's word about a redeemer.

And so you remember from Deuteronomy 25, that if someone dies, a woman is widowed, then her brother-in-law, who's at the same home, so presumably unmarried, was obligated to marry her and carry on the name of the deceased brother.

This obligation, it seems, was less binding on a cousin, or as you went out from immediate family or whatever Boaz was. And yet he still shows loving kindness and says he will marry Ruth.

Now that's the recap. I need to also give you a bit of background about redeeming land this time. So in Leviticus 25, we see that the land must not be sold permanently because, like everything else in this world, it's ultimately God's.

[3 : 53] But he's given it to Israel on like a lifelong lease. And God wanted every tribe in Israel and every family within every tribe to share in this land.

And so if a person was Paul and had to sell their land, then there was an obligation, not just on the brother-in-law, but on the nearest relative to redeem the land, to pay a price in order to save the land from going outside the family.

The original owner could buy it back later if they could, but every 50 years in the year of Jubilee, it will be returned to the original owner, and they can go back to his property.

And so in this way, every family could enjoy God's promised land, you see. Well, as we've heard, Naomi needs to sell her land to survive, and so there's an opportunity for her nearest relative to redeem it, and with it, Ruth, to carry on her dead husband's name.

And so, as Graham mentioned, this blossoming romance between Boaz and Ruth is in trouble, for Boaz is not the nearest relative and has gone to town to find who is, or the one who is.

[5 : 15] And so we were left wondering last week, who will win Ruth? Boaz or this other guy? So point one, verse one. Boaz has gone to town, and meanwhile, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there, just as the guardian redeemer he had mentioned came along.

Boaz said, come over here, my friend, and sit down. So he went over and sat down. And now the town gate was like the meeting center in those days.

Houses were so built so closely together. It was the only real open space for community and business to take place. So Boaz goes there hoping to find this other guy, this other redeemer.

And again, we're reminded of God's sovereign work, aren't we, in verse one? Boaz sits down, verse one, just as the guardian redeemer he's looking for turns up.

It's another God incidence. In fact, in the whole book of Ruth, God does not speak even once. And yet he's clearly at work, isn't he? Just like he is today.

[6 : 24] Well, Boaz now mentions the opportunity to redeem, verse two. He takes ten elders, sits them down, verse three. He says to the guardian redeemer, Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech.

I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest you buy it in the presence of those seated here and the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if not, tell me, I will know.

For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am the next relative in line. I will redeem it, he said. Now remember, Boaz is keen to marry Ruth.

He said he would last week. But he starts with the land because this carried a greater obligation for this man since he was the nearest relative.

Remember the Old Testament law. And it is an attractive opportunity because Naomi has no sons anymore, does she? So this man could buy the land to keep it in the family as per the law in Leviticus, and he would keep it even in the year of Jubilee.

[7 : 33] He wouldn't have to give it back. There's no sons to give it to. It's a good business opportunity for him. But there's a twist. Boaz points out that this redemption involves a greater cost than just buying the land, verse 5.

Then Boaz says, On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property. Do you see the cost?

Not only does he have to pay for the land, he has to marry Ruth, provide for Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi, and the firstborn son gets the land, and he has to give it back to the son.

It will be legally his. So what seemed like a good business opportunity turns out to be a costly one. I'm guessing most of you remember the airline called Ansett, Ansett Australia.

It was owned by Air New Zealand. The week before Ansett collapsed, Air New Zealand apparently offered to sell the whole airline, airplanes and all, to Qantas for \$1.

[8 : 40] It sounds like an attractive business opportunity, doesn't it? A whole airline for one buck. Until you realize the billions of dollars worth of debt that came with Ansett.

And so what looked like a good business opportunity turns out to be a costly one, and so Qantas very quickly said, No. Well, so too here. Verse 6. At this the guardian redeemer said, Then I cannot redeem it, because I might endanger my own estate.

You redeem it for yourself. I cannot do it. Now it's hard to know how marrying Ruth might endanger his own estate. My Bible study groups were kind of wrestling about this, trying to come up with all sorts of reasons.

I'm not sure there's a genuine one, actually. And even if there is a genuine reason, even if this is legit, I think our writer seems to subtly condemn this man's lack of kindness and generosity, because the writer never names him.

In verse 1, where Boaz calls him friend, it's literally certain one. So, verse 1, Boaz says, Come over here, certain one, and sit down.

[9 : 57] That's what it literally says. Now don't you think Boaz would have known the name of his relative? Of course he would have. He knew exactly who he was looking for. And so it's our writer who deliberately refuses to name him.

In a book where the writer uses so many names, let me just look at the end of our passage, for example. In a book where the writer uses so many names, then not naming this man is significant. It's as though the writer thinks this man's lack of kindness means he's not worth remembering. He's a Mr. Nobody. For he's not willing to pay the real cost of redemption.

But Boaz is. And so after some sandal swapping in verse 7 and 8, Boaz announces in verse 9 to the elders, Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Marlon.

I've also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Marlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown.

[11 : 06] Today you are witnesses. Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming to your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel.

May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. Boaz gets the girl. Woo-hoo! And it seems like the elders and the people cheer. They praise God and call on God to bless the happy couple.

And they ask that Ruth might be as fruitful as Leah and Rachel, from whom come the 12 tribes of Israel. Remember the 12 sons they had. I mean, that's a lot of kids, isn't it? But I think the point is not so much the number, but the significance.

For as they also go on to say, that may she be like, family be like that of Perez, but Perez, from whom comes a very significant person. And as we'll see, that prayer is answered, not just in terms of David, who comes from them, but someone even more significant.

[12 : 17] But also notice, they pray that Boaz's name might be famous in Bethlehem for being willing to pay the cost of redemption. Unlike Mr. Nobody, whose name we never learn.

It's a happy occasion, especially when we realize the results of this redemption point to. Have a look at verse 13. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.

When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi, praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian redeemer.

May he become famous throughout Israel. Do you notice here that the work of redemption is ultimately God's work? I mean, in chapter one, it seems Ruth was married to Marlon for 10 years, but had no children.

Yet Ruth marries Boaz and conceives on their wedding night. Now, maybe Marlon was unable to have children. After all, his name comes from the word that means sick and weak.

[13 : 27] But what's the real reason, according to the writer in verse 13, who enabled her to conceive? The Lord. And in verse 14, who do the women praise for providing this redeemer?

The Lord. You see, the work of redemption may involve the activity of people, but ultimately it's the work of God, which is why we need to keep praying for our non-Christian family and friends, that God might work in their hearts to redeem them.

Perhaps praying that God would raise up Christian peers and colleagues to share with them the good news of Jesus, particularly as we approach Christmas. For redemption is God's work.

And he does it in order to save people and give them life to the full. This is the result of redemption for Naomi. Verse 15.

He, that is the child, will renew or restore your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.

[14 : 47] Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, Naomi has a son. And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

I'm not sure why the women get to name the child. Did you notice? It feels a bit unfair. Poor old Ruth was the one who gave birth. And maybe they were kind and let the women name him.

In any case, the child is named Obed, which means servant, for he will serve Naomi as her redeemer. In fact, in verse 17, Obed is actually called Naomi's son, even when Ruth gave birth. Because Obed, you see, will renew or save Naomi's life. He will sustain her in her old age. He will carry on the family name of Elimelech and Marlon. You see, here is God's redeeming kindness through Ruth to Naomi, who it seems is better than seven sons.

[15:54] And so in a sense, Naomi has been more than compensated for the loss of her two sons. For through Ruth, God fills Naomi's emptiness.

Remember how Naomi replied in chapter one, I went away full, but I came back empty. And each week we've seen God progressively filling her emptiness. Chapter one with Ruth, chapter two and three with food through Boaz, and now chapter four, an heir through both Ruth and Boaz.

In a sense, the book could actually be called the book of Naomi, since it starts and ends with her, and is about God filling her emptiness. But it is called the book of Ruth, because it is through Ruth, this unlikely hero, that God saves Naomi, and gives her life to the full again.

But there's a second result of this redemption through Ruth, this time for Israel. And remember, Ruth began in the time of Judges, and the book of Judges ended, saying this on the next slide, in those days, there was no king in Israel.

Everyone did, was right in his own eyes. Now, this verse is not just a statement of facts, that there was no king. I think it's also an indictment on Israel, because they actually had a king.

[17:19] God. In fact, when Israel asks for a king later on, in 1 Samuel, to be like the other nations, which is an ominous reason already, God says, they have rejected me as their king.

And their first king, Saul, turns out to be a real dud. So, it's not that Israel needed a king to fix everything. That's not quite right.

Rather, it's about the type of king, who'd point them to God, the true king. And one through whom God would save them, and give them life to the full, give them rest, like Ruth.

Which is why our writer ends the book of Ruth, not with Saul, but with David. Twice. Verse 17 and 22.

Because David was a man after God's own heart. Remember. And through David, God saves, on the next slide, them from their enemies, and gives them rest, life to the full.

[18:32] This is the result of redemption through Ruth, for Israel. David. But it did not last, because Israel were exiled.

Which brings us to the third and final result of redemption through Ruth, this time for us. The genealogy of Jesus from Matthew chapter 1, includes a genealogy of names, here in Ruth, that we weren't, we didn't actually read in the reading.

Graham chickened out. I'm just staring, Graham. The point is, through Ruth, comes the most significant child, and king, Jesus.

And it's this king, Jesus, who perfectly points people, to God, because he is God, the son, isn't he? And it's this king, Jesus, that God redeems us, from sin, and gives us life to the full.

Today is the start of Advent. Four weeks till Christmas. I can't believe it. I feel like we've just all lost two years of our lives. But at Christmas time, remember the birth of Jesus, and his name was also important to remember.

[19:44] It means God saves, because through this king, this child, God would save us from our sins. Or as Peter put it, from our second reading on the next slide, he says, it was not with perishable things, such as silver and gold, that you were redeemed from the empty way of life, but, verse 19, with the precious blood of Christ.

You see, unlike Mr. Nobody, Jesus willingly paid the price of our redemption, to save us from an empty way of life, a life without meaning, or hope, or God, all of which leads to judgment.

And through Jesus, God fills our emptiness with life to the full, as it says at the bottom of the slide. If we trust in him, and so do you.

Do you trust in Jesus? Have you been redeemed from an empty way of life, and given life to the full, that is eternal life. And for us who do trust, then the first application really is to remember our redemption, that we might realize we have a full life.

Do you realize this? Often we think of a full life in terms of one who's had a good innings. Have you heard of that expression, good innings? You know, you've had a long and healthy life, you've accumulated a good amount of wealth, you've enjoyed lots of experiences, some international travel.

[21 : 19] This is all pre-COVID, of course. That's how the world defines it, though. It's not how Jesus defines it. Rather, a full life according to Jesus is one where you know God through him.

And so with that, have eternal life. I mean, you can't get much fuller life than eternal life. Can you? And the more we realize this, then I think the more content we'll be with what we do have in this world, and not wish for the things we don't have, because we know we have life to the full.

I don't know if you remember that terrible accident in Sydney last year, when a drunk driver killed those three kids who were on the way to the shops. Remember that? Beginning of last year.

The mother was interviewed the day after it happened, yet with the cameras in her face and tears in her eyes, she said she forgives the drunk driver who killed her kids.

She said, I'm not going to hate him because that's not who we are, meaning that they're Christians. But then she also said on the next slide, to be honest with you, I am sad, I am heartbroken, but I am at peace because I know my kids are in a better place.

[22 : 39] You see, despite not seeing her kids grow up in this world, get jobs, perhaps get married, provide some grandkids for her, despite them not having a full life as the world defines it, she knows they have a full life as Jesus defines it.

And so she's not bitter about whatever they've missed out on, but can actually say they're in a better place. Do you see? So the first application is to remember our redemption, that we might realize we have life to the full, and so be content with what we do have rather than wishing for things we don't.

And the second application is to remember our redemption, that we might live life for God rather than this world. Do you remember our second reading, that slide from 1 Peter?

He says, to live out your time as foreigners in reverent fear. Foreigners, this world is not our true home, and so we're not meant to find hope and meaning in it, but we're like tourists, just passing through.

And so we're to live our lives for God, not this world. Lives that seek to please God in reverent fear. And not just because God will judge us, verse 17, but also because of verse 18, for because you know that you've been redeemed from that empty, worldly way of life.

[24 : 11] And at great cost, the precious blood of Christ. And so how can we not live to please God in response?

Let me finish with a final story. This is Liz. When she was a little girl, she had an accident at school and was rushed to hospital. The next slide, it talks about Liz needing lots of blood to save her life. 12 units, I think they used on this when she was a little girl. And now as an adult, in response, she volunteers at a blood bank.

As she writes, I realize I'll never be able to thank the people that gave for me. I can never repay them for that act of kindness.

So I'll do my best to make sure there is blood for others. It's the least I can do. Well, we needed the blood of Christ to save our lives from sin and judgment.

[25 : 17] And we can never repay that act of redeeming kindness. But we can do our best to make sure we live lives that please him.

It's the least we can do. And so remember our redemption that we might realize we have a full life. And remember our redemption that we might live life for God rather than this world.

It's the least we can do. Let's pray. Our gracious father, we thank you so much for this great story and historical event of Ruth.

We thank you that it is a lovely story that is so well written. That shows us the kindness of many characters. But we thank you, as Annette said at the start, that it points us to your kindness, particularly in the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose blood he has redeemed us.

And so help us to, we pray to remember our redemption, that we might realize we have life to the full and so be content. And help us to remember our redemption, that we might live our lives for you in response.

[26 : 31] We ask it all in Jesus name. Amen.