

God's Redemption Love

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Date: 06 March 2022

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[0 : 00] But I do want to start with a question at the top of the outline, which you now can read very clearly. And the question is, why do you obey the rules? Now, of course, only answer this question if you do obey the rules.

All right. But most of you do. Do you obey the rules because you have to or because you want to? And, you know, to be honest, I think for most of us, it's a bit of a mix, isn't it? Sometimes you do it because you want to. You agree with them. You think it's right. But sometimes you only obey because you have to. You don't think much of the rules, but you do it anyway. Perhaps you don't want to be punished or it's part of a social contract. You're part of a community that you've agreed that you do it. Or you just want to please others. So I've been looking at many of you have been looking at the TV with what's happening with the war at the moment in Ukraine. Just take the men in the Ukrainian men at the moment in their country.

[1 : 08] Many of you will know that as a result of the war, no adult male can leave the country. They are meant to stay and fight. Now, many of them would want to obey, right?

They are patriots. And we've seen images of many of them taking their children and their women. Really sad, actually. And then having dropped them at the border, turning around to go back. But they want to do it because they want to defend their country. I suspect, though, that there are some among them who are probably only doing it because they have to. They don't want to be arrested and be, you know, sort of put on trial as deserters.

Or they don't want to be ridiculed by other men. Well, as we continue to look at Ruth in Chapter 3 today, we want to ask a similar question. Yes, we are all interested in whether Boaz will marry Ruth. But actually, the more interesting question is, does Boaz marry Ruth because he has to or because he wants to?

[2 : 13] So let's get into it. I've made you wait an extra week. So first, let's look at verse 1 where the story continues. One day, Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, My daughter, I must find a home for you where you will be well provided for.

Now, Boaz, whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. So you can imagine Naomi is probably at home. She's seen Ruth head out to work each day, touched by her kindness. And yet, even as she's standing there, probably at the stove or doing the laundry or whatever, preparing meals, she's wondering how their long-term future could be secured. And in particular, for her daughter, Ruth.

And so she comes up with a plan to find Ruth a home. Remember that word from our very first week? The home being a place of security and provision.

And this was particularly important because once Naomi herself is gone, Ruth will become a foreigner all by herself in Israel. Now, Naomi knows of the family connection between her and Boaz.

[3 : 22] And she wonders how she's going to take advantage of this. Well, she's obviously been keeping an eye on Boaz's movements. And so here's the plan. She says, Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.

Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor. But don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating. When he lies down, note the place where he's lying.

Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do. Now, there's something rather secretive about what Naomi proposes.

And we'll get back to it in a little more detail a bit later. But this is rather an audacious ask of Ruth. Now, there are various interpretations of what uncovering Boaz's feet and lying down mean.

But I don't think we need to read anything sexually illicit into it. Instead, lying at his feet is a sign of submission. And implicit in that is an offer of herself in marriage.

[4 : 30] So this is clearly a position of vulnerability. vulnerability done under the cover of night. So that if Ruth is rejected, she isn't put to shame by that request.

And Ruth, realizing that risk, nevertheless agrees. And here's what happens next. Ruth answered, I will do whatever you say. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirit, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. So Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.

In the middle of the night, something startled the man. He turned and there was a woman lying at his feet. So you can imagine poor Ruth having to be really patient.

Who knows how long she's been lying there, hoping that she'll be noticed. I imagine she probably took a feather just to tickle his feet or something. Just so he will wake up. But Nami's plan for Ruth's provision is now in train, isn't it?

[5 : 31] It's been put into action. And the question is, would it work? We'll get to Boaz's response in a while. But first, in verse 9, this is what Ruth requests. Boaz has asked, who are you?

Startled. And she said, I am your servant, Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian redeemer of our family. So we see firstly that Ruth acknowledges her submission.

She's Boaz's servant. But then we get this request to spread the corner of your garment over me. This is a request for protection and provision in marriage.

And in fact, God uses the very same language in Ezekiel 16, verse 8, which I've got on the next slide, where he describes himself coming across Israel and covering her nakedness with the corner of his garment.

And then he enters into a solemn vow or oath, covenant entered into where Israel becomes God's betrothed. And interestingly, as we read on, Israel is then washed and adorned with perfume and dressed, very much like how Ruth has done this before she meets Boaz.

[6 : 45] But then here we find Ruth adding an additional rider. She says, please do it because you're a guardian redeemer of our family.

So this wasn't just a wishful request, you know, oh, please, can you marry me kind of thing. It actually has a basis in Old Testament law. Ruth is drawing Boaz's attention to his obligation under it.

If you're not familiar, well, this law is found in Leviticus chapter 25. And in verse 25 of that chapter, it says this, if one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold.

The rest of the chapter, if you bother to go and read it, details how all of these little rules work and under what situation. Hopefully next year, having finished Exodus, we might come back to Leviticus in our Pentateuch this year.

And we might look a bit more as we do in that book. But in the chapter, if you go and read that in the meantime, what is described there is redemption of property.

[7 : 56] It's not redemption of people. The only time when Israelites are redeemed is if they have been sold to a foreigner in the land, and then they can be redeemed. But otherwise, all the laws talk about redemption of property.

There's no mention of marriage. So this request of Ruth doesn't fit with Leviticus chapter 25.

For that obligation, Ruth is actually referring to another part of the Old Testament law. And that is the section on liberate marriage, which we find in Deuteronomy chapter 25.

I'm going to go to it and actually read it in full because it's relevant. So in verses 5 to 10, it says, However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel.

He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me. Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, I do not want to marry her, his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face, and say, this is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line.

[9 : 38] That man's line shall be known in Israel as the family of the unsandled. So his name is going to be changed to Mr. Barefoot. All right. And, you know, for Ruth to know this part of the Old

Testament was actually quite impressive, even though she was a foreigner.

And it was even more poignant, given that at this time, Israel herself had not paid much regard to God's law. Of course, Boaz was an exception.

We already see from last couple of weeks that Boaz is a law-abiding Israelite. And so now we hear his response to Ruth's request. He replied in the next verse, The Lord bless you, my daughter.

This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.

All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am a guardian redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

[10:40] Stay here for the night, and in the morning, if he wants to do his duty as your guardian redeemer, good, let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it.

Lie here until morning. Now, Boaz, you know, could have reacted or responded quite differently.

Because technically, this law regarding the liberate marriage only applied, as you've seen, to a widow's brother-in-law, which Boaz wasn't, was he?

So it's not clear how he's actually obliged to marry Ruth. It could have been customary. We don't know. But the other thing, of course, is that we also find out that he's not the nearest next of kin.

Someone else actually has a prior duty before him, a first right of refusal. And so he could have said to Ruth, Oh, interesting, Ruth, that you've mentioned this, but you know what?

It's not my problem. If this other guardian reader doesn't want to marry you, then, you know, you can do what the Bible says. Go to the elders at the town gate, you know, spit on him, slap his face, or whatever.

[11:53] But, you know, don't involve me. It's got nothing to do with me. Right? So he could have said all that, couldn't he? He would have been complying with the law. But, of course, he doesn't do that, does he? Boaz certainly wants to abide by the law, but he's not legalistic about it.

He doesn't simply do it because he has to. No, his response, as we shall soon see, is over and above what the law requires. He fulfills the law, yes, but he does more than that, more than what's required of him.

So, first of all, he doesn't recognize Ruth's request as something that's just a legal request, but he says that it's Ruth's kindness in actually approaching him.

He doesn't call her a gold digger, being opportunistic, you know, because he was rich. But rather, he says that she's not run after other younger men, you know. After all, Ruth, he can see, is a woman of noble character.

She would make an excellent wife for a lot of other men. But no, she chooses Boaz instead. Yes, he's rich, but you know what?

[13:02] He's getting on in age a bit, you know. Would he have what it takes to continue the family line? Don't know. And so, we see Boaz being gracious to Ruth's kindness, but then more than that, we see Boaz being generous as well.

It's not that he has no regard for the law, as I said, but rather he obeys it, and then some more. And so, in complying with the law, he tells Ruth that the right thing to do, actually, is to go and first ask this other guardian redeemer.

That man ought to be given a first chance to marry her. But he assures her that if he's not willing, then he would do it. That is to actually assure Ruth that this is going to be a win-win situation for you.

If he marries you, great, but if he doesn't, don't worry. Don't be anxious because I will. Either way, you're going to come out all right, you and Naomi. But wait, because Boaz does even more.

And so, Boaz now shows Ruth yet more kindness by saying to her that she could stay until morning, but then encourages her to leave before the sun rises. Why?

[14:17] Because no one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor. He does this not to protect his own reputation, but actually hers, because if this other guardian redeemer agrees to marry her, then she must not be tainted by any sort of suspicious activity with him.

So, again here, he's being kind, isn't he, to Ruth. But his kindness also extends to Naomi as well, because Naomi now gets even more barley in verse 15.

So, he says, bring me the shawl you're wearing and hold it out. And when she did, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. And then he went back to town. And Ruth came to her mother-in-law and Naomi asked, how did it go, my daughter?

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, he gave me these six measures of barley saying, don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed. And so, just as he's been providing for them over the last chapter or so, Boaz continues to provide for Naomi and Ruth. It's almost as though he's already treated them as part of his family. And so, the chapter ends in verse 18 with Naomi saying, wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens.

[15:33] For the man will not rest until the matter is settled. The character of Boaz is clearly evident, isn't it? So much so that Naomi knows that this man will settle.

He will get to the bottom of it. She didn't need to worry about anything. Well, we're going to save the climax or the resolution of this story until next week in chapter 4. But now I just want us to have a think about what's just happened.

Because if you think about this, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, as I've alluded to, could have gone and done all these things in a rather different way. They didn't have to actually go through this method. For a start, because these laws that I've just mentioned are pretty explicit, Naomi could have just taken a very transactional approach to getting a solution.

What I mean is that she could have turned up at the door of the other Redeemer and demanded that he fulfill his obligations to redeem. If needs be, Naomi could bring Ruth along and say, look, you get a really good wife with that as well, you know, as a bit of an enticer.

[16:37] But she didn't need to go and do all this roundabout way of getting Ruth to go and lie down and all that kind of stuff, did she? In short, Naomi could have demanded her rights and insisted that justice for her be enforced.

And she may well have got to the same outcome. And yet, if you think about it, although the outcome may be the same legally, how different do you think the dynamics of all the relationships in the parties to this transaction would have been?

Very, very different, don't you think? Do you really think you'll get the same outcome if Boaz was made to obey the law as opposed to what happens now where Boaz is allowed to do this willingly and gladly?

Very different, isn't it? And if you remember, what was Naomi's aim right at the very start? It was to find Ruth a home, wasn't it? And a home is a place where she would be loved and desired and valued.

Not a place where, you know, someone has, oh, she's come with the transaction, I've got to put up with her and tolerate it. And where the marriage is almost like a forced marriage. Can you see how very different the outcome is even though legally it's the same situation?

[17:58] And, you know, I've been reflecting on this in some of the stuff that I've been seeing in our society today in this whole search for justice and some of the talk that goes with it.

Now, don't get me wrong, the desire for fairness and equity and looking out for the weak is an entirely noble one. It's the right thing to do. And there's a place for making laws that are fair and having structures that prevent, you know, people being mistreated and all that.

But at the end of the day, we as a society must desire justice in order for there to be true justice. That is, the aim ought to be to win people's hearts, not just to compel them into it.

Only then do we have true justice, don't you think? Not legalistic and transactional, where people only comply because they have to, but no, where they do it out of conviction, not coercion.

That they want to be fair. They want to look after the weak because they want to do it. Not because the law says they have to do it. Because after all, at the end of the day, do you see that love cannot be forced?

[19:08] Can it? And it's the same with all the other relationships that we have in our lives, the most important ones. So just to give you an example, as a parent, I have the authority to make my children respect me.

All parents do, by the way, in case you didn't realize. I can insist on it, but I try hard never to, right? Because as a parent, our greatest joy comes when children respect us gladly and willingly because they want to, not because they have to, right?

And it's the same with all the other relations, their husbands and wives. It's the same with leadership here in church. Let me ask you this question. Do you want to be part of a church where the pastor has to insist on being respected?

Almost to the point of being abusive and controlling. Or do you want to be part of a church where nobody respects people in leadership? And you just do what you want.

Neither, right? Rather, I'm pretty sure you want to be in a church where everyone respects duly appointed leadership. And they do so, why? Willingly and gladly.

[20 : 19] Because their leaders reflect the qualities of Boaz. Where leaders love God's law and yet go above and beyond. Where leaders care for those under them selflessly.

And my prayer is that with God's help, all of us as leaders in the church will desire to do that, including myself. And the reason why we do that and the reason why we all desire leadership like that is because at the end of the day, that's exactly how God is himself.

You know, ask yourself this other question. Does God have to follow what he says in the law, including the promises that he's made to us? Well, of course not. He wants to follow it.

He wrote it himself. Of course he wants to do it. But more than that, when he's actually fulfilling his promises to us, he's not doing it in a cold-hearted, transactional way because, you know, I'm only doing it because I want to be true to my word.

That's not how God looks at it when he wants to fulfill his promises to us. On the contrary, when he does so, he's motivated because of his love. for us, isn't it?

[21 : 27] And we saw that in that reading in Romans 5, verse 8, where it says, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, while we were unlovable, almost, is what it is, Christ died for us.

And it's the same in John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

So yes, God has promised to save us in the Old Testament, but the reason he's promised us is because he loves us. The reason he will be true to his promises is because of his love for us.

So don't get me wrong, when we look at God's salvation and what happens on the cross, there is an essential legal aspect to it. That's why we call it redemption. Redemption is a transaction, isn't it?

That's why we also call it penal substitutionary atonement, if you understand what that means. That is also a transaction, right? But, what is occurring when Jesus dies on the cross is that God is satisfying himself in terms of his own righteous requirements.

[22 : 39] It's almost a transaction that occurs between God and himself. And yes, we're party to that transaction, but only as beneficiaries. It's not like we're on the other side and we can pay something and he can pay us back.

No. It's as between God and himself. And we get the blessing. We get the benefits of that transaction. And I have to say, if you look from the Father to the Son, it's the same with Jesus as well.

The question, did Jesus die on the cross because the Father made him? Well, no. Of course he obeyed the Father. Of course that was the will of the Father, but he desired to participate in God's perfect plan of salvation.

And he did it, yes, because he loved the Father, but he also did it because he loves us, each and every one of us. Jesus died, not because he had to fulfill the Old Testament, only because he died because of his love for us.

And I wonder whether you see that at the very heart of redemption, what's there is actually God's love for us, and the love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[23 : 50] And what we see here in chapter 3, that the way Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth went about redemption actually gives us a window into God's own redemption for us.

In and at the very heart of redemption is God's amazing love for you and for me. That's what's really happening. And so, I wonder whether this very knowledge grips you so that when you look into the face of your Savior and Lord Jesus, you see the deep love of his Father and of him for you.

My prayer is that that's what you keep seeing each and every day of your Christian life. Because when you do, it will compel you to serve him, not because you have to, but because you want to. that the demands of God's word is not a burden for you, but a joy, because you see that he's done it out of love for you.

He's given it to you because he loves you. And then we will be able to say like Ruth did to our Lord Jesus, we, the sheep of your pastor, are your servants.

[25 : 05] Spread the corner of your garment over us since you are the redeemer of our family. And then we will pray, as we will at the end of the service.

Take us and use us to serve you and all people in the power of your spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.