

God's Redeeming Kindness

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[0 : 00] Well, in the early years of being married, I forgot our wedding anniversary once or twice. Okay, three times in a row.

All right, all right. I'll be honest. And so I tried to redeem myself at the time we were living in Sydney. So I brought Michelle a season pass to the ballet at the Sydney Opera House.

Three shows, one for each of the three times I forgot our anniversary. I thought it was pretty good, right? Until the first show when I fell asleep during it.

I mean, I had to redeem myself from that as well. The point of the story, though, 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 ballet shows to save face. But we can also pay in order to save someone's land or to save someone's life from being empty, both of which we'll see in our last chapter of Ruth today.

[1 : 06] In fact, the chapter today is all about redemption. The word redeem comes up nine times in our chapter in one way or another. I've put them in bold on your piece of paper so you can just see how often they come up.

That's more than twice the number of times of any other chapter in Ruth. So the big idea of the passage is redemption. But it begins with the word meanwhile in verse one because we're in the middle of an exciting story.

So let me briefly recap the story so far and then give you one bit of background info you'll need for today. Remember chapter one, we heard how Naomi went away from Israel full, but then she said she came back empty.

And then in chapter two, we saw God's sovereign kindness working behind the scenes with all those coincidences or perhaps better named God incidences to connect Ruth with Boaz.

And then in chapter three, last week, we saw how Naomi recognized God's sovereign kindness in providing Boaz. And so she comes up with this risky plan to find rest for Ruth.

[2 : 22] But Ruth went further. She actually told Boaz to propose to her. Some guys are just too slow off the mark, you see. And remember, the proposal was to spread the corner of his garment or wing over her.

And Christian had that really helpful illustration of that wedding garment that he and Grace had last week. In fact, I was talking to a friend a while ago who said that he was catching the train to work one day when a lady sat down next to him.

And the corner of her coat kind of fell across her leg. And he thought, had she been reading Ruth? But Naomi's plan and Ruth's request were both based on firstly God's work in providing Boaz and then God's word about a redeemer from the Old Testament.

Remember on the next slide from Deuteronomy 25, this word about if a widow, if a brother dies without a son, then the widow must not marry outside the family, but the husband's brother, who in the broader context is still at home unmarried, must marry the widow and the first son carries on the deceased's name.

Now, this obligation was to a brother-in-law. It seemed like the obligation got less the further away or down the family line you went, to cousins and to, well, whatever Boaz was.

[3 : 47] And yet he still shows loving kindness and says that he will marry Ruth. Remember, that's the recap. The background, though, is about redeeming the land this time, not a person, but land.

And so on the next slide in Leviticus 25, God says that the land is not to be sold permanently because it's like everything else in this world. It ultimately belongs to him.

It's his. Rather, it's given to Israel on like a long, lifelong lease. There were tenants to look after it for life. And God wanted every tribe within Israel and every family within every tribe of Israel to enjoy some piece of this promised land.

And so if a person was poor and had to sell the land and there was an obligation, not just on the brother this time, but notice it says there the nearest relative underlined there to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.

So that, you know, pay a price to save the family, the land and keep it in the family. So it won't go outside the family. Now, the original owner could buy it back later if they could afford it.

[5 : 00] But notice on the last line, it will automatically be returned in the Jubilee. That's every 50 years. And then that poor person can still go back to his property.

All this was so that each family could enjoy part of God's promised land. Well, Naomi needs to sell her land to survive.

And so there's an opportunity for her nearest relative to redeem it today. And with it, Ruth to carry on her dead husband's name.

And so as we saw last week, this blossoming romance between Boaz and Ruth is in trouble. Boaz is not the nearest relative and has gone to town to find the one who is.

And so we were left wondering last week, who will win Ruth? Boaz or this other guy? Well, we're at point one, verse one. It's the same morning, Boaz has gone into town.

[6 : 00] And we read, 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. Now, the town gate was like the town center in those days. Houses were so closely built together that it was the only real space for chatting and doing business.

And so Boaz goes there hoping to find this other redeemer. And again, we're reminded of God's sovereign hand at work, aren't we? Because did you notice in verse one, it says Boaz sits down just as the guardian redeemer he mentioned comes along.

It's another God incidence, if you like. In fact, in the whole book of Ruth, God does not speak even once. Yet he's clearly at work, isn't he?

Just like he is today. Well, Boaz now mentions the opportunity to redeem, verse two. He takes ten elders of the town and says, sit here, and they do so.

[7 : 08] Then he said to the guardian redeemer, Naomi has come back from Moab and is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people.

If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me. So I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am the next in line. I will redeem it, he says.

Now remember, Boaz is keen to marry Ruth, but he starts with the land because this carried the greater obligation for this man, since he was the nearest relative.

And it's an attractive opportunity because Naomi has no more sons, does she? And so this man could buy the land to keep it in the family, like the law in Leviticus says, and he wouldn't have to give it back to the family in the year of Jubilee, because there'd be no one to give it to, no more sons.

So he'd get to keep it. It's a good business opportunity. But there is a twist. Boaz points out that this redemption involves a greater cost than just buying the land.

[8 : 25] Verse 5. Boaz said, On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you will 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 the redeemer have to pay for the land, and he can get to use it for a while, but he also has to marry Ruth, provide for her and for Naomi, and then give the land back to Ruth's firstborn son, for the land would legally be the son's.

And so what seemed like a good business opportunity actually turns out to be a costly one. I'm guessing most of you, I think, will remember the airline called Ansett.

Do you remember Ansett Australia years and years ago? It was owned by Air New Zealand. The week before Ansett collapsed, Air New Zealand apparently offered to sell the whole airline, all their planes, everything to Qantas for one dollar.

Sounds like an attractive deal, doesn't it? A whole airline for one buck. But of course, with that came the billions of dollars worth of debt with the deal.

[9 : 44] So what looked like a good business opportunity turns out to be a costly one. And so, verse 6, Now, it's hard to know how marrying Ruth might endanger his own estate.

My Bible study groups are kind of wrestling with this during the week. And I'm not really sure if it's a genuine excuse or not. But either way, the writer seems to subtly condemn this guy's lack of generosity, lack of kindness.

Because the writer never names him. In verse 1, where Boaz calls him friend, you know, Come over here, my friend. It's literally certain one.

So the narrator has literally written, Come over here, certain one, and sit down. Now, don't you think Boaz would have known the name of his relative? Of course he would have known.

He knew exactly who he's going to town to look for. So it's the writer who refuses to name him. And in a book where the writer uses so many names, like the end of our chapter, then not naming someone is significant.

[11 : 06] It seems the writer thinks this man's lack of kindness means he's not worth remembering. He's a Mr. Nobody. He's not willing to pay the real cost of redemption, but Boaz is.

And so after some sandal swapping in verse 7 to 8, which is the equivalent of swapping contracts today, Boaz announces in verse 9. He announces to the elders and all the people, 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.

Today you are witnesses. Then all the elders and the people at the gate said, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into 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.

[12 : 19] Boaz gets the girl and everyone cheers. Cheers! Woohoo! Well, actually they pray, which is even better. They pray that Ruth might be as fruitful as Leah and Rachel, from whom come the 12 sons and the 12 tribes of Israel, which is a lot of kids, right?

But really it's not about the number, it's about the significance. In fact, they also say that their family might be like that of Perez, who Tamar bore. And how does the chapter end?

With the family line of Perez, which leads to someone significant, David. And in fact, he leads to someone even more significant.

So their prayer is answered. But they also notice, pray that Boaz's name might be famous, well known in all of Bethlehem, unlike Mr. Nobody, whose name we never, ever learn.

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

[13 : 32] When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi, Now 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. No kids. Ruth marries Boaz and conceives on their wedding night. Now maybe Marlon was unable to have kids.

After all, his name comes from the Hebrew word that means sick and weak. But what's the real reason, according to the writer in verse 13?

You see in verse 13, Who enabled her to conceive? The Lord. And in verse 14, Who do the women praise? The Lord.

For providing this Redeemer. You see, the work of redemption may involve the activity of people, but it's ultimately the work of God.

[14 : 46] Which is why we need to keep praying for our non-Christian family and friends, that God would do his work in their lives. Perhaps even sovereignly raise up Christian peers or colleagues to share Jesus with them.

Particularly as we approach Christmas. For redemption is God's work. And he does it in order to save people. To give them life to the full.

This is the result of redemption for Naomi. Verse 15. He, that is the child, will renew your life, Naomi, 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. 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. Now, I'm not sure why the women get to name the child. It seems a bit odd.

[15 : 54] Poor old Ruth was the one who gave birth. Maybe Boaz and Ruth let the women name the child. I'm not sure. 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, when Ruth was the one who gave birth. Why? Because Obed will renew, or literally restore, save Naomi's life, sustain her in her old age, and carry on the family name of Elimelech and Marlon.

You see, here is God's redeeming kindness to Naomi, who saves her from emptiness, and fills her life again, with Ruth, who's better than seven sons, which more than makes up for the loss of two.

Remember in chapter one, Naomi said, I went away full, but I have come back empty. And each week, we've seen God progressively filling her emptiness.

First in chapter one with Ruth, then chapters two and three with food through Boaz, and here in chapter four with an air through both Ruth and Boaz.

[17 : 09] In a sense, this book could be called the book of Naomi, since it starts and ends with her. It's about God's kindness in filling her emptiness. But the book is called Ruth, because it's through Ruth, this unlikely hero, this Moabite, that God saves Naomi, and gives her life to the full again.

But there is a second result of this redemption through Ruth, and this time for Israel. Remember, Ruth began in the time of the judges, and the book of Judges ends on the slide there.

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Now, that verse is not just a statement of facts, that there was no king in Israel.

I think it's also an indictment on Israel, because they actually had a king. God was their king. In fact, when Israel asked for a king later on in 1 Samuel, they want a king, notice at the top, so they can be like all the other nations, which is an ominous sign.

They were supposed to be different to the nations. But then God says to Samuel, they have rejected me as their king. And so it's not that Israel needed a king to fix everything.

[18 : 29] It's not quite right. Rather, it's about the type of king who would point them to God, the true king, and one through whom God would save them and give them life.

which is why our writer ends the book of Ruth, not with Saul, who was actually the first king, but a dud. He ends with David twice, verse 17 and 22.

For David was a man after God's, remember, own heart. He pointed people to God. And through David, on the next slide there, God did save them from all their enemies and give them rest or life to the full.

This is the result of redemption through Ruth for Israel. But sadly, it did not last. Israel were exiled, as you know, which brings us to the third and final result of redemption through Ruth, this time for us.

The genealogy of Jesus, from our second reading in Matthew chapter 1, includes all the names of the genealogy here in Ruth, which Kate and Vera kindly read for us.

[19 : 44] I felt a bit bad about giving you all those hard names. You did very well. I've actually got some chocolates in my bag. Flakes. So, come and see me after this. You did very well.

But I hope you saw the connection, right? Because through Ruth comes the most significant child, Redeemer, King, Jesus. And it's this King Jesus who perfectly points us to God, because he is himself God, the Son.

And it's through this King Jesus that God redeems us, saves us from our sin for life to the full. I can't believe today is the start of Advent, and Christmas is only four weeks away.

I feel like we've all lost two years of our lives. But at Christmas time, remember the birth of Jesus and the name he was given, which was significant.

The name Jesus means God saves because he will save his people from their sins. Or as Peter puts it on the next slide, he says, it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life, handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ.

[21 : 03] You see, unlike Mr. Nobody, Jesus willingly paid the price for 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 Jesus said at the bottom there. Life eternal, which comes with meaning, hope, and God in this life.

In fact, it comes with every spiritual blessing in this life, and every physical blessing in the life to come. It's eternal life, if you trust in Jesus.

And so do you. Have you been redeemed from an empty way of life? For us who have, who do trust, then the first application is to remember our redemption, that we might realize we have a full life.

Do you realize you have life to the full? We often think of a full life in terms of, you know, someone who's had a good innings. Have you heard that expression before? You know, they've had a good innings, they've amassed a good amount of material possessions, they've enjoyed a long, relatively healthy life, they've enjoyed lots of experiences, perhaps traveled to a number of places.

[22 : 30] But that's how the world defines a full life. It's not how Jesus defines it. Rather, a full life according to Jesus is one where you, know God through him, with life eternal.

I mean, you can't get much fuller than eternal life, can you? And the more we realize what we have, the more we'll be content in this life, and stop, keep wishing we had more things, because we have life eternal.

I don't know if you remember that terrible incident in Sydney last year, when a drunk driver killed those three kids, do you remember? They were on their way to the shop. The mother was interviewed the day after, and with cameras in her face, and tears in her eyes, she said she forgives, no, back, sorry, yep, she forgives the drunk driver.

She said, I'm not going to hate him, because that's not who we are, meaning that they're Christians. And 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.

You see, despite not seeing her kids grow up in this world, not having jobs, careers, getting married, perhaps providing grandkids for her to enjoy, despite them not having a full life, as the world defines it, she knew they had a full life, as Jesus defines it, such that she can say they are in a better place.

[24 : 11] For whatever they or she misses out on in this world is nothing, compared to the fullness of life they have in the world to come. And so, first application, on the next slide, remember our redemption, that we might realise we have a full life, that we might be content with what we do have.

Rather than wishing for things we don't. And then secondly, remember our redemption, that we might live for God, rather than this world. In that Peter reading, next slide, thanks, he says, to live out your time as foreigners here, in this world, in reverent fear.

In other words, we're not to live for the things of this world, trying to find hope and meaning in them. We're foreigners, this world is not our true home. We're like tourists, just passing through.

Rather, we're to live our lives for God. Lives that seek to please God in reverent fear. Not just because God will judge us, verse 17, but also because of verse 18.

For, because, you were redeemed from that old, empty way of life. And at great cost, the precious blood of Christ.

[25 : 30] And so, how can we not live to please God in response? Let me finish with this true story. This is Liz.

When she was a little girl, she had an accident at school, and was rushed to hospital. She needed a lot of blood. I think that says there on the next slide, thanks, Tim. I think she ended up with 12 units of blood, which I believe is quite a bit, to save her life.

And now that she's an adult, she volunteers at a blood bank. 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 that blood is there for others. It's the least I can do.

We needed the blood of Christ to save our lives from sin and judgment. And we can never repay that act of redeeming kindness.

[26 : 34] But we can do our best to make sure we live lives for him in response. 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 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 book of Ruth in the Bible.

We thank you that it's a great story, that it does warm our hearts, as we see the kindness of all these characters. We thank you that their kindness, but we thank you that their kindness appoints us to your kindness in Christ, through whom you have redeemed us.

Help us, we pray, to remember our redemption, that we might realize we have life to the full, and so be content in this world. Help us to remember our redemption, that we might live our lives for you, rather than this world.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.