

SUMMER B4 - God's Redemptive Kindness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 2015

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 01] Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you continue to speak to your word, even a word that was written hundreds and hundreds of years ago. And Father, even that word still contains truth and guidance for us today.

And so Father, as already has been prayed, we pray again that you would indeed give us minds to understand your word, but more than that, hearts that would seek to live it out. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, I must confess that I am not the best at remembering my wedding anniversaries. In fact, when I got married, I even got it inscribed on the inside of my ring to kind of give me a heads up so I could take it off and check.

And I have been known to forget it once or twice, okay, three times. I've forgotten it three times. But after the third time, I tried to redeem myself, you know, buy back the debt of three anniversaries worth that I owed.

And so I might have told some people this before already, but I bought Michelle, my wife, a season pass to the ballet, which just so happened to be three shows, you know, one for each of the three anniversaries I'd missed.

[1 : 14] It's not bad, eh? It's pretty good. It's pretty romantic. I was quite proud of myself. The only problem was during the first show, I fell asleep and then had to redeem myself from that as well.

But the point of the story is that we often try to redeem ourselves in various ways, don't we? And to redeem means to buy back or to pay off a debt that we owe, like I tried to do with anniversaries.

And as we come to Ruth chapter 4 today, we'll see that it's all about redemption, redeeming or buying back, in particular the land that Naomi must sell to survive.

In fact, the word redeem occurs nine times in this chapter, which is far more than any other chapter. Unfortunately, they're not always translated in our English versions.

But let me show you just from verse 4. So chapter 4, verse 4, just have a look there and I'll read it out more literally. It goes like this. I thought, Boaz says, I should bring the matter of the land to you, saying, buy it before the inhabitants and before the elders of my people.

[2 : 19] If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not redeem it, tell me that I may know. For there's no one else to redeem it besides you, and I'm after you. And he said, I will redeem it.

Five times, one verse. That's the big idea of the passage, redeeming. But for Naomi and Ruth, they cannot redeem themselves, as we often try to do.

Their poverty is such that they are dependent on another to redeem them, to redeem their land and so provide for them. But you may have noticed that in verse 1, it actually starts with the word, meanwhile, meanwhile.

And that's because we're actually in the middle of a rather exciting story. In fact, it is still the same day as it was in chapter 3, the end of chapter 3.

And so if you missed last Wednesday night, let me briefly recap it for you and then give us a bit more important background information. So the story so far is that Naomi returns to the land with her door-in-law, Ruth, the Moabitess.

[3 : 24] And Naomi returns bitter, you might remember, from chapter 1. Because in her words, I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. And in chapter 2, we saw God working to provide for her through Boaz.

His sovereign and silent hand was at work, you might remember. For example, Ruth just so happens to work in Boaz's field. And Boaz just so happens to turn up and see Ruth.

And he's attracted to her noble character, showers her with kindness and so on. And then last Wednesday night, we came to the marriage proposal. Naomi had a plan to provide rest for Ruth, you might remember, which involved Boaz marrying Ruth.

For Naomi saw God's provision in Boaz. He was a kinsman redeemer. And so Ruth actually asks Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her, you might remember, which was like a marriage proposal, where a man would say, I want to take you under my wing to provide for you.

In fact, I was talking to a friend not too long ago who said that he was catching a train to work one day and a lady sat down next to him on the train and the corner of her coat fell across his leg.

[4 : 42] And he wondered, had she been reading Ruth? But Naomi's plan involved Boaz because she saw God providing for them through Boaz.

She exclaimed in chapter 2 that, you know, God has not forsaken the living and the dead. He's provided this man, this guardian redeemer. So that's the recap.

But for the background information, I pointed out last Wednesday that a redeemer was a close relative who had obligations on family members. These obligations were more or less binding depending on how closely related you were.

So last Wednesday we saw that if a woman was widowed, then her unmarried brother-in-law was obligated to marry her and to carry on the family name of the deceased brother.

But this obligation was less binding for, say, a cousin or a second cousin and so on. But there were other obligations upon relatives which involved keeping the land in the family or the clan.

[5 : 52] And this is very important. You see, God had promised the land of Israel to the people of Israel. And it was divided up among the 12 tribes.

And again, within the clans of those tribes. It was still God's land, but he gave it to them. It was like a lifelong lease. But the point here is that the land was to remain in the family or the clan because it was God's gift to them.

He wanted to make sure that each clan could enjoy his blessing, his promised inheritance to them. And so on the next slide, from Leviticus chapter 25, we read this.

The land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine, says God, and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.

[6 : 58] And so here we see this obligation on the nearest relative to buy back the land for the original owner, if they could. And if the nearest relative could not buy it back, then it went to the next nearest relative to redeem or buy back.

Though it seems the further you went, the less you were obligated. Of course, the original owner could also buy back the land themselves if they were able to. And if no one could buy it back, then it was given to them after 50 years, the year of Jubilee, you might remember.

But all this was so that the land would stay in the family, so that it would stay in the clan because it was God's gift to them. You see, God was keen that each family enjoyed his promised blessing, the promised land.

They're part of it. And so now that Naomi has to sell her land to survive, there is an opportunity for her nearest relative to redeem it, to buy it back. And it's this nearest relative whom Boaz has gone to town to find.

Because with the land also comes Ruth. And so this blossoming relationship between Ruth and Boaz that we saw at the end of chapter 3 could come unstuck if this other redeemer takes the opportunity to redeem the land and marry Ruth.

[8 : 19] And so we're at point 1 and verse 1 in your Bibles, the opportunity and the cost of redemption. So verse 1, 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 here was like the town center in those days. Our houses were built so closely together that the only real space for meeting people and doing business was the space at the town gates.

And so Boaz goes there hoping to find this other close relative, this other redeemer. And again, we are reminded of God's sovereign hand at work to provide. Because as soon as Boaz sits down to wait for this man, who is it that just so happens to come along at that very moment?

The very man he's looking for. And verse 1 literally says, Meanwhile, Boaz went up to town, the town gate, and sat there. And behold, the guardian redeemer he had mentioned came along.

[9 : 26] The narrator wants us to see that God is still at work through these ordinary things. As I mentioned before, God does not speak directly at all through the book of Ruth.

But he's still clearly at work, isn't he? Even in the ordinary, everyday things of life, he is still at work. And we must not forget that. Because it's easy to forget it.

Well, after Boaz sees the man and asks him to sit down, we read in verses 2 to 4, Boaz took 10 of the elders of the town and said, Sit here. And they did so.

Then he said 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 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 next in line. I will redeem it, the man says.

[10 : 28] Now, we need to remember here that Boaz is keen to marry Ruth. But interestingly, he starts by talking about the land. Some commentators wonder whether this is a sly trick on Boaz's behalf.

But again, given the kind of godly character we've seen he has so far, I think, that he mentions the land first because this is of particular importance to this kinsman redeemer.

You see, the nearest relative was to redeem the land. But it was the brother-in-law who had the obligation to marry. And so the particular concern for this kinsman redeemer, who wasn't a brother-in-law, was the land.

And so that's why Boaz mentions it first, I think. But this is an attractive opportunity for the man. You see, Naomi had no sons to inherit the land. She was too old to have any more children.

And so eventually this man would get to keep the land for himself. He was in the clan after all, so the land stayed in the clan. But he got to keep it for himself.

[11 : 33] Instead of paying for it now, only to give it back later to Naomi's son. It's an attractive opportunity for him. But then Boaz points out that this redemption involves a greater cost than just buying and keeping the land.

Have a look there at verse 5 to 8. Then Boaz said, Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to another.

This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel. So the guardian redeemer said to Boaz, Buy it yourself. And he removed his sandal. Now do you see the cost?

Well, the man does. Not only does the kinsman redeemer have to pay for the land, but he also has to marry Ruth and provide for her and for the mother-in-law Naomi and then give the land back to Ruth's firstborn son so that the family name of Elimelech might be able to continue.

And at that point, the son would own the land. I mean, can you imagine having to get your son's permission to use the land that you paid for? Well, and so what seemed like a good deal turns out to be a rather costly arrangement.

[13 : 14] I'm guessing most of you remember the airline Ansett. Do you remember the airline Ansett? It's going back away now. It was owned by Air New Zealand. And the week before Ansett collapsed, Air New Zealand apparently offered to sell the whole airline of Ansett to Qantas for \$1.

Now when you hear that, I kind of get excited. I could own all this fleet of airplanes for \$1. That sounds really exciting. And then you stop and think about it and realise that you'd be buying all its debt as well.

And so what looked like a lucrative business deal actually turns out to be a rather costly arrangement. And so also here, the man says he cannot redeem the land for it might endanger his own estate.

And it's hard to know, I think, whether the man really cannot afford to be this generous, you know, to buy the land and provide for Ruth and Naomi, or whether he simply does not want to be this generous.

I suspect it's the latter. I suspect he does not want to be this generous. Why do I suspect this? Well, because of the text. You see, in your Bibles in verse 1, where Boaz says to the man, my friend, do you see that in your Bibles?

[14 : 30] Verse 1, he says, my friend, come and sit here, or sit down. The Hebrew for my friend is literally so-and-so. That's what he's called, so-and-so.

And so Boaz, the narrator, literally has Boaz saying, come and sit here, Mr. So-and-so. Now, I doubt Boaz would have actually called his relative Mr. So-and-so.

He would have called him by his name. He knew who he was. And so I suspect the narrator, it seems, deliberately refuses to use this man's name. And in a book where the narrator uses so many other names, particularly in this chapter, at the end of the chapter, where he got all those names, not naming this man is significant, I think.

It seems like the narrator thinks that this man's lack of generosity means he's not worth remembering. He's not worth naming because he didn't show kindness.

He didn't act like God. The cost of redemption was more than he was willing to pay. But not so for Boaz. Boaz is more than happy to pay.

[15 : 42] And so after some sand or swapping, in verses 7 to 8, Boaz announces, in verses 9 to 12, then Boaz announced 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 have 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 the elders and all 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.

Boaz gets the girl and everyone cheers. They joyfully call on God to bless this marriage, to bless both Ruth and Boaz.

[16 : 52] And they ask that Ruth might be as fruitful as Leah and Rachel, from whom the twelve tribes of Israel came. In other words, may many and great people come from Ruth, is what they're saying.

And they also pray that Boaz's name might be famous in Bethlehem, unlike Mr. So-and-so, whose name we never find out. It's a happy occasion, isn't it?

Especially when we realize the work and results of this redemption. Which brings us to point two and verse 13. So 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. And the women said to Naomi, 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. And he was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Notice here that the work of redemption is ultimately God's doing.

[18 : 18] I mean, in chapter 1, Ruth was Marlon's wife for 10 years and they had no children.