

Redemption and Joy

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: 26 August 2012

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Ruth chapter 4, this is the final chapter. Ruth's been great, eh? Ruth has been so great. I've absolutely loved preaching in Ruth. And I think it would be helpful before we look at Ruth just to have a really quick slide over 1, 2, and 3.

Okay, Ruth chapter 1, we learnt about Naomi, who's this woman who's been very beaten up by life. At some point in life was probably pretty good, husband, two kids, boys, which was great back in the days because they kept the family name going and they could inherit the land. But then a famine came and it all went sideways. Her husband moved the family to Moab, this pagan country. The husband died. The two boys married local girls. Then the boys died. And so there is Naomi in this really vulnerable position. She did have a couple of things going for her. She heard that the famine had ended back home in Bethlehem. She decided to go back there. And she had this very loyal daughter-in-law called Ruth who decided to go back with her. However, despite all these good things, Naomi at the end of Ruth 1 was a bitter woman. She even said that, you know, God is against me. And this bitterness sort of had robbed her of seeing the good stuff that was going on. All right, that's chapter 1. Chapter 2. Chapter 2, we learn about the providence of God. Ruth goes gleaming in this field, which is like picking up, you know, scraps in a random sort of person's field. Turns out the field that she's kind of randomly kind of walked on was owned by a relative called Boaz, a relative of Naomi's late husband. And it's one of the big themes of Ruth is this idea that God's providence just kind of works its way out in very ordinary ways in our life.

So Boaz was really kind to Ruth. But at the end of the chapter, Naomi and Ruth are still in this hard place, right? They're kind of at the end. They're living day by day. They're still gleaning to get their kind of stuff. The threat of, this sounds fancy, familial extinction is still hanging over them, right? Because there's no boys to carry on the name.

And so they're in a tough spot. But we learn about what it's like to live as faithful, obedient people when you are in the middle of a tough story. And we learn from Ruth to, you know, she was very brave and courageous and loyal and hardworking. And Naomi beginning to recognize God moving in her life. And Boaz living very generously, living not just the letter of the law, but living out the heart, you know, the heart of the law.

[2 : 34] Okay, Ruth chapter 3. That was Benj, Petrolli, last week. Ruth came up with a plan. It was a pretty audacious plan to get something going. So she sent Ruth in the middle of the night to cuddle up beside Boaz on the threshing floor after he'd had a good meal and a couple of glasses of wine. And somebody actually asked me, actually several people asked me last week.

They said, did you, jokingly they said, did you give Benj, you know, that passage on purpose? Absolutely, I did. I get the choose who preaches. And I was looking through Ruth and I was thinking, wow, that could get very messy, that passage. So, in turn, you know. But he did a wonderful job of explaining and I thought it was just a great job of explaining it. You know, it wasn't a completely sort of salacious kind of situation there on the threshing floor. It was this, it was a very unorthodox marriage sort of proposal. Anyway, Boaz says, yes, I'm into this, this is great, but, you know, I'd like to marry you, but there is a closer relative who's kind of got first dibs, which sounds, it's a terrible way of saying it, but basically what happens is you have these prominent male relatives who are men of means and it's kind of their job culturally and it's God's law that they're supposed to look after people that are in trouble within their kind of family clan.

And Boaz was one of those guys and he was like, yeah, I'm into this, this is great, but there is actually a closer relative who has kind of first prerogative. It's his first option.

So, that's where Ruth 3 ends, in limbo. I mean, we learn a lot about God working through the, working out his plans through the kindness of faithful, obedient people, but it kind of ends in this kind of like, okay, what's going to happen, you know? So, Ruth chapter 4 is the resolving chapter.

Ruth chapter 4, what we're looking at now. How is Boaz going to deal with his relative? Because it's, you know, it's pretty clear that he's quite keen on Ruth, but more importantly, what is God teaching us?

[4 : 42] What's God got to say to us in Ruth chapter 4? So, folks, let's have a look. All right. Verses 1 to 6. 1 to 6. Just slide your eyes over there just to remind yourself of what's going on there.

Verse 1 there. So, now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down and behold, the Redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So, Boaz said, turn aside, friend, sit down, and he turned aside and sat down.

Okay. Back in the days in these ancient towns, the gate, sort of strangely in our mind, the gate was the center of the city. It was where the poor begged. It was where business deals were done. It was where justice was administered. It was where elders met. So, Boaz went there with a bit of a plan, and at first it kind of looks a bit boring because, you know, it's men talking about business and not like last week's kind of scandalous foot thing, you know, but it's actually a really intriguing and suspenseful little narrative here. So, what he does is he gathers a quorum. He needs 10 elders to make kind of a business deal official, right? And so he gets the 10 elders, plus he gets the other close relative, and he's him. He's got them together all around him. And we're caught off guard straight away because here's what he says. He says in verse 3, then he said to the Redeemer, Naomi, sorry, who has come back from the country of Moab is selling a parcel of land. Land. Land. We're talking about land. You think he's going to talk about Ruth, right? You kind of think that he's got these guys together, and you kind of think he'd say something like, listen, so there's this girl, and I can't, I don't want to talk about it a lot, but, you know, I really like her, and I want to look after her because she's good. She's a good woman.

And, but here's the thing, you've kind of, it's kind of your job. You've got first option to kind of care for her and stuff, but if you're not into it, I'm totally into it. If you're not into it, I'm totally into it, right? But he doesn't do that. He starts talking about this land, which is kind of like at a left field. We didn't know that Naomi had land or her husband had lands anyway. Just a little bit of background on the land thing. Land was the center of inheritance back in the days, right? So the land passed on to a son, and being poor and childless and without resources, Naomi had to sell her land, this mysterious land, right? So that's, that's my best explanation for this scenario here, okay? So the person who should buy the land is called the kinsman redeemer, the kinsman redeemer, okay? And as explained, this is the, the kind of the, it's a weird way of saying it, the highest ranking, uh, close male relative. His job to look after the folks in his wide, wide clan who were in trouble. And so it would look like him kind of buying it, but taking care of Naomi, kind of looking after the land, et cetera. It's a great idea. It's a great idea. It's God's idea. So Boaz is a kinsman redeemer, but he's not the only one. He's this guy who's a closer relative.

[8 : 08] So he is more obligated. Okay, back to the gate. So Boaz, this other relative, and some elders are called into a meeting to talk about Naomi's land. Now the other relative isn't named, so we will call him, uh, Mr. No Name. We'll come back to that. Mr. No Name. So Boaz says to Mr. No Name, okay, mate, you have first option on the land. Uh, it's your job to buy it and look after Naomi. If you don't, I will. And Mr. No Name is thinking, this is awesome. I get a new field. I get, uh, Naomi who is kind of older. I mean, she's got no kids. So the great thing about that is that my kids will inherit this land. So she's thinking, um, he's thinking, I'm, I'm totally winning. Verse four. Yes, I will take it. And then Boaz plays his master stroke. He says, by the way, the land, uh, comes with a Moabite wife.

Just, it's fine. Don't worry about it. It's hardly worth mentioning. It's just that when you take possession of the land, there is this Moabite widow who you have to marry. So yeah. Now I don't know if you've seen somebody backpedal very quickly, right? But this guy backpedals very, very quickly. He goes from saying, you know, I will buy the land. Well, you have to marry the girl. I will not buy the land. And he gives this really, he gives this kind of interesting answer, which is not, it's not obvious what's going on, but his answer here, he says this, he goes, it will impair my inheritance. So what's he talking about there? Okay. If he just got the land, Mr. No-Name, that'd be great for him. He'd care for Naomi. She's older. She'd die without an heir. Mr. No-Name, his kids, would get the land. It's good for him. It's a good deal for him. But having to marry Ruth, that means, that has the potential of her having a son to him, which would mean Mr. No-Name would spend all this money caring for Ruth, for Naomi, for the son, buying the land, resourcing the land, and at the end of it, the son of Ruth and Mr. No-Name would get it all. And it would all be in the name of the

dead husband. So No-Name would end up with less than what he currently has now. So No-Name is very happy to be the kinsman and redeemer when it worked to his advantage, but not when it cost him. Now, Mr. Boaz was hoping Mr. No-Name would say no. Because it meant he was next in line. It meant he would buy the land. It meant he could marry Ruth. Let me make two points about this. And I think two points which can be easily missed. [11:13] Because we could look at this, and we could turn this into a fairy tale. And we could say, oh, this is so great. You know, the glass slipper fits. The handsome young prince rescues the damsel in distress. Everything worked out in the end. It's great. It is true that the rescue is significant. But if we solely focus on the fact that this, you know, lovely woman was rescued, we miss something. If we say it was all bad, and God peered through the clouds and saw somebody in trouble, and he sprinkled some fairy dust, and it all went good, you know, we miss a really big point. And the point is about the cost. The cost. There is a lot of detail in this conversation, right? We introduce this new guy. He says he's into it, and then he decides he's not into it because it's going to, you know, mess with his money and stuff. Why? Why all that stuff? Why? Well, redemption costs. And Boaz was happy to sacrifice to help. Mr. No Name was not.

Redemption costs. We see this. This is a big Bible thing, you know. And God's first act of kind of kindness undeserved in the Bible when, after Adam and Eve had sort of descended, you know, after they had, you know, eaten the fruit, and then they realized they were naked. You know the story, right? And they're hiding, and God finds them. And what does he do? He covers them in animal skins.

He covers their shame in animal skins. It's easy to pass over the fact that God had to sacrifice something to do that. To help humanity, it costs. To redeem that situation, it costs. And we see this played out throughout the Old Testament, the sacrificial system, right? It sounds so nasty to us when we sort of think about it. And yet it's meant to show us, amongst a lot of other things, redemption costs. And of course, the climax of history in terms of the cost of redemption is Christ, right? On the cross. Now, the other point I want to make about this is, did you notice that in an attempt to save the inheritance for his own namesake, Mr. No Name ends up remaining nameless forever? In an attempt to keep his name, the word name is used a number of times in this, in an attempt to keep his name, his family line as strong as possible, he becomes eternally anonymous. And this is the principle that Christ talks about, I think, in Luke 17, when he says, whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will keep it.

So in summary, this first little section here, and I'll do the next section very quickly, but the first little section here, this interaction points us to Christ's work on the cross, but also has these implications for us in terms of how we live. Because you need to know that following Jesus involves sacrifice. I remember a guy coming and speaking at my church in New Zealand about, this was a long time ago, about 15 years ago, and the story is pretty hazy, but there's one part of the story I remember very vividly. So this gentleman was called Simon, I'm pretty sure. And he was a transgender gentleman, and he lived as a woman for like 10 years.

[15:25] And he was very slight, and he had very high cheekbones, and he had quite a high voice, and he looked, I mean, he showed photos of him living as a woman, and he looked like an attractive woman. And so that was his, you know, that was his life. And he was booked in for a sex change operation, and like a couple of weeks before he was really, he was going in, he became a Christian, and turned around and, you know, cancelled the operation, and became part of a small church, I think in the south, I think in Texas maybe. And so he started, you know, kind of dressing as a man again and attending this church, and he talked about, and this was the, this is the only non-hazy part of the story that I remember, because it's really stuck with me. He said the men of the church would hang out with him, would take him out bowling, would take him to the pub, would go out to restaurants with him. And he said, and this is the only part I really remember, he said, I knew the cost to them doing that, hanging out with somebody that looked like me, because he was very effeminate, and very different to traditional Texan kind of guy, right? He goes, I knew the cost, and I love these men for that. Folks, can I just ask you this question, can I just challenge you with this, and then I'll leave it alone. Is God calling you into a relationship of sacrificial love with somebody? Okay, we'll move on. Verses 7 to 10. This is when the deal is ratified, and it's, it's kind of culturally interesting. They exchange sandals, so there's not much to say about that. The key part, I think, is in verse 10, when it says what Boaz, in his words, what he thinks he's doing here, how he frames what he's done. He says, this is to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, and the

name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. So it's not like, oh, this is awesome.

I've got me a little Moabite wifey and some cheap land, and it's great, you know. No, it's about keeping the inheritance in the name of the dead husband. So again, it's highlighting the selfless act of Boaz. Okay, moving on, climax of the story, 13 to 17. We see there, if you just have a squiz over there, Boaz marries Ruth, they have a son. And here is just one of the most beautiful scenes in the Bible, I think. This wonderful picture, and I'll read it to you in verse 16.

You remember right at the start of, in chapter one, you've got Naomi, who's just going like, oh, my life is awful, God is against me. People say, hey, Naomi, oh, no, just call me Mara, which means bitter. So you've got that, and here, verse 16.

Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the woman of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, a son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed, which means servant. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. See, that's great, eh? So God has completely reversed Naomi's situation.

And then we have these four verses right at the end. A genealogy. It could feel like a letdown. It's not. You never rush past the genealogy. It's here for a purpose, and a very significant purpose.

There's this preacher called John Henry Jowett. He was a Presbyterian preacher in the early 1900s, and he did the Yale lectures on preaching one year.

[19 : 34] 1912. And he described a great preacher as one who seems to look at the horizon rather than the enclosed field, rather than the local landscape. And here's what he says. He's talking about preaching. He has a marvelous way of connecting every subject with eternity past and with eternity to come. It is as though you were looking at a bit of carved wood in a Swiss village window. And you lifted your eyes and saw the forest where the wood was nourished and still higher, the everlasting snows. And this is what the author of Ruth is doing.

They're taking us from... He or she is lifting our eyes from this little town, this woman, this little scenario here, to the greater work of God in history. God is not just... It's not a story of God just sorting out the struggling widow. God was preparing his people for the coming of the greatest king Israel would ever know, King David, who in turn was preparing us for Christ. So the genealogy here does not let us leave the story thinking, wow, wow, Naomi was like really... She was lucky how God kind of just buzzed in and did some cool stuff and got out of there and, you know, wish God would kind of do that, miracles, you know. It doesn't leave us, it doesn't let us think that about God.

Oh, I hope God likes me lucky like Naomi, you know. No, the genealogy says that God has a plan to redeem his people. And in this story, this particular story, he uses faithful, obedient, and broken people to move that along. And I think that's a lot more encouraging to us than just, wow, God does some really cool random stuff sometimes, eh?

Okay, folks, I'm going to tidy up. Give me one minute. We've covered a lot of ideas in the last four weeks. So let me finish with a reminder of a couple of the big lessons from Ruth. One, there is a God. There is a God. Two, God has a plan, which he's working out in history. God's sovereignty, that plan can look accidental in our life. It can look random. It can look like normal life. So, you know, don't be discouraged if you just feel like you're kind of living this normal life and God's not there. God is there. He's in control. God's plan involves redemption.

This redemption is something we receive, like Naomi, but also participate in through the hesed, through kindness shown by Ruth and Boaz to Naomi. This redemption will evolve in time, a complete reversal of the brokenness we experience in the world. But right now we're kind of in Ruth chapter two, maybe chapter three. And this redemption costs, and it costs dearly. And when we step back from this beautiful little story, the most profound biblical picture we have of reversal, of redemption, and of its great cost is, of course, the life and death of Jesus. Folks, that's Ruth. Can I get an amen?

[22 : 53] Amen. All right. Come pray, whoever is praying. Thank you, Isaiah. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.