

Intergenerational Blessings

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[0 : 00] Well, you might want to take the Bible and turn back to Ruth chapter 4, page 224. I'm a bit sad to finish the book of Ruth, frankly. It's got umami.

It's got so much flavor to it. There's a fullness and a surplus that we've not been able to cover. And chapter 4, as it was just read for us, shows us that through God's good providence, the real meaning and significance of our lives reaches out beyond our lifetime into the future and into eternity.

And the problem is that when we read this book, we think, oh, it's a romance with a happy ending. It's not. But if you've been with us, you know that Naomi's losses are never reversed.

She never gets her husband back. She never gets her two sons back from the dead. She never gets an explanation for the sufferings that she endures. She never gets to see the fruit of her faithfulness.

But what happens at the end of the book shows that through the purposes of God, the deepest meaning of Naomi's life is larger and more significant than she can imagine.

[1 : 22] So I'm afraid I'm going to ruin it for you today. It's probably better just to read chapter 4 straight through and work straight through it. But I'm going to go to the end and ruin it. This is prominent. My wife and I have a disagreement on how to read books, you know.

She always goes to the last page, especially in mysteries, to find out what happened. That's close to sin in my view. That's what I'm going to do this morning.

I'm going to do it because it's so extraordinary, the ending, and it shines this brilliant high beam back over the whole story where we see everything in a different light. And we see ourselves in a different light.

So in chapter 4, yes, they do get married, Boaz and Ruth. Yes, they have a baby called Obed.

Verse 17. Obed has a son called Jesse who has a son called David.

And we go, really? Do you mean King David? The greatest king and messiah in all the Old Testament? David's grandmother, great-grandmother, was a Moabite woman?

[2 : 25] Really? And just in case we miss the importance of this, in verse 18, the narrator becomes very solemn.

You notice that? Now, these are the generations. This is the genesis of Perez. And then at the end of verse 20, again we hear Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, Jesse fathered David.

Of all the Old Testament characters, it's David who points most clearly to Jesus Christ. Remember? God anoints David to be king and shepherd of his people.

God appoints David to be his son on earth. And when we come to the New Testament, the first words in the New Testament, a thousand years after this little genealogy, you remember the first words?

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David. And then it repeats this genealogy and it has two additions.

[3 : 28] It adds two women into the genealogy. Rahab, who's Boaz's mum, and Ruth. So you see, the deepest meaning of our lives is beyond what other people look at and can see in us.

It's beyond what we can see in ourselves. The deepest meaning in our lives lies in the secret providences of God that reach out beyond our life into the future.

The importance of Naomi's life, the importance of Ruth's life, is beyond their lives because of the abundance of God. Just think about it. No Naomi, it's not easy to say.

No Ruth. No Ruth. No Obed. No Obed. No David. No David. No Jesus. Amazing. And God's purpose is so overflowing with grace and love and fullness, they cannot be contained.

They cannot even be understood with just one life or just one generation. They spill over with spiritual surplus. Until we come to the meaning of our own lives and the meaning of this world and the meaning of time and the meaning of the cosmos, Jesus Christ himself.

[4 : 44] That's what is in God's heart throughout the book of Ruth. This is a story about the coming of Jesus Christ. This is what's been going on through the hidden hand of God's providence in the really difficult and puzzling circumstances of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz's lives.

So, that's why I wanted to start at the end, because the meaning of Naomi's life, the meaning of Boaz's life, the meaning of Ruth's life, is far more than the total experiences, the sum total of their days.

And the same is true for us. Through their faith in God, God catches them up in his great plan, the great plan for the world and humanity, the coming of the Son of God, David's greatest son.

The meaning of your life and the meaning of my life is not the sum total of our experiences or our relationships or our hopes and dreams. It's certainly not what other people can see.

It reaches out beyond our lives and it comes to focus in the person of Jesus Christ. The temptation for us is to be so self-focused and self-preoccupied to think that the answers of life lie in me, in my individual lives.

[5 : 59] But here's the thing, as one commentator says, Ruth teaches us that God's providential purpose includes me but does not centre on me.

And that means when we walk by faith in the very ordinary circumstances, what you face this afternoon and what you face tomorrow, if we look at life through the lens of faith, we are saying, the answers lie beyond my circumstances.

I am not at the mercy of my circumstances. God is bigger and higher and longer than I can see with the naked eye. God's purposes with me and for me are deeper than I can capture in just my own life.

And that means I can trust God in the most difficult suffering because he is ordering all things according to the purpose of his will toward the Lord Jesus Christ. The deepest significance of my life and your life is hidden with Christ in God because God is greater than my faith and his purpose is more wonderful than I can discern.

It's fantastic, isn't it? And I think it's individualism that cuts us off from this big, wide context. It's individualism that makes us short-sighted and narrow, you know, where things look big which aren't big and things don't look big that really do matter.

[7 : 24] This is where the book of Ruth is such a help to us. Do you remember chapter 1? Full of death. Naomi leaves the land of her husband Elimelech and her two boys, Marlon and Chilion. And they go off to Moab in famine and then Elimelech dies.

The boys marry, no children. Both boys die. The point of this is it's not just a private and personal tragedy. This is the possible annihilation of a family from the Old Testament people of God.

It's a body blow for the whole people of God. Because the children of Israel in the Old Testament are not just, they're not just looking at themselves.

And whenever a child is born in the Old Testament, it's not a private happy blessing for the family. This is the living embodiment of God's promise for life and blessing, carrying the promises to the next generation.

So when Naomi returns with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, she believes she is empty and without hope and God has no future for her or for her family.

[8 : 26] But the Lord has been working quietly. The Lord has been working in the unseen ways. And the Lord works through Boaz. And Boaz shows this hesed love, this unique God love to Ruth.

And when Ruth tells Naomi in chapter 2, verse 20, Naomi prays for Boaz. And she says, This man is a close relative of ours, one of our adeners.

Then in chapter 3, which Dan preached on last week, the scene of cold feet in the night. I really like that. Naomi tries to give God's plan a bit of a boost up.

And she tries to manipulate Boaz toward Ruth. And she puts Ruth at risk. And we come after that night scene to this high drama of chapter 4.

And everything is at stake. The whole future of the family is at risk. And there are three scenes. So I want to look at these three scenes together with you. And I've got fabulous headings.

[9 : 40] So the first scene is verses 1 to 6. And I've called it Risky Redemption by the Right Redeemer. So everything's up for grabs. Boaz very much wants to be the redeemer for Ruth

because he knows he will marry her.

But he also knows there's another redeemer who is closer in family relationship to Elimelech. Now, you might be thinking, yeah, we're used to thinking about redemption in terms of the forgiveness of sins by the payment of a price.

Jesus Christ is our redeemer. But this book is in the Old Testament to show us there is another shape of redemption. There is another configuration of redemption.

In the people of Israel, when a man died without children, the possible danger was that his name would be annihilated from that family name would be annihilated from the people of God.

And there was provision made that someone who would be related to him may take his widow as a wife and raise up children for the man who had died so that his name and memory wouldn't die out.

[10:52] And that was called redemption. And it usually involved land. Land. And again, stay with me for this. Land in Israel is not just dirt.

It's not just property. It was the holy land. It was God's chosen place. It was allocated to the different families by God when they entered the land. And if a man and a woman died without children, the family would be lost forever to that family.

But it was possible for someone in the wider kinship circle to buy the land. And that was also called redeeming. And this redeeming was never forced on anyone.

And back in chapter 3, when Ruth approaches Boaz in the night and she asks him to spread his wings over her, it's very bold, because she is asking her to marry him.

There's another sermon on that somewhere. And she's asking her to redeem him and to redeem all that belonged to Elimelech and to Marlon and Chilion.

[11:58] This is going to be very costly for Boaz. And there on the floor, in the middle of the night, Boaz does not take advantage of her. Instead, do you remember what he does? He prays.

And he praises her for her hesed love to Naomi. He obviously has feelings for her, but he's a man of integrity. And he points out that there's someone in the family tree who's closer to Elimelech than he is.

Verse 13 of chapter 3. And I think we've come to love Boaz and Ruth, and we want them to be together.

And that's what's hanging in the balance when we come to chapter 4, verse 1. So we go to the city gate. City gate's a big, wide-open arch with some seats around it, which is where the big decisions, legal decisions, important transactions took place.

And the other redeemer in verse 1, the closer kinsman, we never get his name. Behold, we read in verse 1. Behold, the redeemer came by. Behold is another reference to the hidden hand of God in providence.

[13:12] And Boaz says, come over and have a seat with the other elders of Bethlehem. Take the weight off. Let's have a cup of tea. And then he does something quite brilliant and quite above board as well.

He puts the whole idea of redeeming before this man, but the way he does it is he puts the property before Ruth. So he announces, you see verse 2, sorry, verse 3, that Naomi, the older Naomi, is selling the land that belonged to Elimelech.

She's still poor. She can't pay her way. She needs the cash. She's being forced off the land to sell it. The mention of Naomi in verse 3 is very important because she's way past childbearing age. She cannot have children. And that means that the redeemer is not going to have to pay for her upkeep, nor the upkeep of any possible children or grandchildren. All he has to do is pay the price of the property.

He sees it as a straight property purchase. Absolutely, he says. That will go nicely in my portfolio. Thank you very much. And we will say, no, we don't want that to happen.

[14:24] What about Ruth and the love and the shelter of his wings and the wrong redeemer and that sort of thing? What about the providence of God? And without missing a beat, verse 5, Boaz says, oh, there's just one more thing, a detail, really.

Just a little tiny thing. If you redeem the land, you're also going to have to redeem Ruth as well. And look how he calls her, verse 5, the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.

And that changes everything. That means that the redeemer is going to have to pay Ruth's upkeep. And if she has children by him, he will lose the right to that property because it's going to go to her

children.

Because the redeeming law from God is a great way to save family from annihilation, but it's going to be incredibly costly to do this redemption. Verse 6, the man says, ah, okay, I see, right, you do it. Because of this costly business. And we know that Boaz has already declared in chapter 3 that he wants to do it. Because for him, it's a way to demonstrate love.

[15:40] Chesed love. And he's going to be happy to pay any cost. So that's the first scene. The second scene runs on, verses 7 to 12. I've called this the solemn sandal swapping ceremony.

Told you they were good. And nobody knows the background to this ceremony. Nobody understands it. But what's more important is we're given the meaning of it in two speeches. First by Boaz.

He calls the people to witness. And again, it's remarkable in verse 9, he mentions the three men who died. Back in chapter 1, verse 5, who've played no active role in the story.

And then he declares the reason he's marrying Ruth, verse 10, the Moabite, the widow of Marlon, I've bought to be my wife, acquired to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from among the gate of his native place.

Because, you see, God's purposes for us do not stop when we die. Boaz is honouring Naomi and Ruth's loss by this costly redeeming. And it completely reverses the threat of annihilation of chapter 1.

[16:52] And it places the women in the full care of the community. And it finally and fully draws Ruth into the people of God.

And what does the crowd do? They pray. They pray for offspring for Ruth. And then, as we saw at the beginning, God's answer to this prayer is bigger and more wonderful than any person there could possibly have imagined.

And the effect of their prayer that day is still being held 3,100 years later today. By all of us who call Jesus Lord and Redeemer and King. And then the third scene, verses 13 to 17, I've called the birth of the baby boy brings blessing.

And the last scene is really about the birth of the child. Verse 13, nothing has told us about the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. And then, for the first time since chapter 1, verse 13, God himself steps into the narrative and takes action.

The Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. We're meant to see this is not just a natural occurrence. It's the gift of God. Ruth had been married to Marlon for a long time, had no children.

[18:09] And God gives this conception of a boy, a child, in answer to the prayer of the very last verse. And the miraculous birth of this child echoes into the story of Jesus.

You almost expect him to read, and they laid him in a manger. But instead, they lay him in Naomi's lap. And again, the women pray. They're like a chorus here.

And when they pray, they show us, they connect us to what God's been doing and to why we need each other in community so much. We need each other close enough to see how the hand of God is working in each other's lives.

And the ability to discern it by prayer and to say it to each other. And the prayer is a kind of a prophecy where the women turn everything in the story upside down.

They turn it on their heads. You look at the prayer they say there in verse 14. It's not Boaz who is your redeemer, Naomi. This baby boy is your redeemer.

[19:11] He will be a restorer of life, a nourisher in your old age. What has reversed the cycle of death was the providence of God shown through the loving kindness of Ruth and Boaz.

And the loving kindness of Ruth is better than seven sons in God's sight, so we think. And then the book takes flight at the end with King David. It's amazing.

And we just have a moment to reflect on two implications for our lives today, I think. And the first very obvious thing is to talk about the connection between prayer and providence.

God's providence has been working through this book. But God's providence works according to our prayers. And the book of Ruth is full of prayer. I don't know if you've noticed this or not.

Because it's through prayer that we grow in our awareness of the hidden hand of God. It's through prayer that God gives us the glasses of faith and we're able to see his hand at work.

[20:22] So in chapter 1, Naomi prays on the way back to Bethlehem for her daughter's-in-law. In chapter 2, Boaz prays for Ruth. In chapter 2, Naomi prays for Boaz.

In chapter 3, Boaz prays for Ruth. In chapter 4, we have all these prayers. So, you know, from one side of the drama, this is the story of God's quiet providence arranging things toward Jesus Christ. But from the other side, from our side, it's a drama of prayer and obedience. Where the movements of God are hidden from our eyes but come to the surface in prayers.

And that's how providence still works today, this side of Jesus. It works by prayer and by the risk of love and by trusting God in the very mundane circumstances of our lives.

And things look so weak and fragile when we're in those circumstances. But his grace really is sufficient for us today. And his power is made perfect in our weakness. And it's not the cleverness of our prayers or the style of our prayers.

[21 : 24] It's not using a right formula. This is a fundamental response to our God, our hesed God. And it's holding nothing back from him but offering ourselves to him.

And it's saying, you're God, I'm not. Your will be done, not mine. I can't see the future but you can. Show me what to do now. That will be best for the Lord Jesus Christ and his cause.

Show me how to further the gospel. And help me rely on you. Work your purpose now. Prayer and providence. Secondly and finally, the connection between redemption and love.

It's through this lovely story that we come to see a whole new side of redemption. It's not just rescue from the slavery to sin by the payment of a price. It is that.

It's not just forgiveness of sins by sacrifice, which it is primarily. But at the heart of redemption is the extraordinary hesed love of God, which lays down his life to bring a person from far away right into the centre of his blessing.

[22 : 30] And it is through the acts of love by the main characters in this book that God works his redemption, not just for them, but through them for others as well.

It's through Naomi. It's through the love of Naomi, the hesed love of Naomi, that Ruth comes to bind herself to the God of Israel. It's through the love of Ruth that Naomi is restored.

It's through the love of Boaz that Ruth is forever brought into the people of God and becomes the mother of Jesus Christ. And I think for all of us who are finding it very difficult to love others, which is all of us, it's helpful to remember that death is at the centre of love.

So when the Son of God comes to the cross, it's not just a business transaction for him. It's not just a general sacrifice with his vague hope that something good is going to come for it.

He died for you. He died for me. And he did it because he loves us. And there is no greater redemption. There's no more certain welcome. And there's no greater love than his for us.

[23 : 41] And that's part of what this book teaches us.