

RUTH: REDEEMING THE MESS

ruth 4.1-12: costly redemption

Questions for Personal Study

- What has been most challenging about the story of Ruth to you?
- Why do you think Boaz insists on involving Mr. Nobody? What was the risk?
- Is Boaz being honest? Why or why not?
- Notice all the names mentioned. Who are all these people?
- What is the cost for Boaz? What is the reward? Is it worth it?

Questions for Study in Community

- What principles of redemption do you see in this story?
- Why do you think Boaz was willing to pay the cost of redeeming Ruth?
- Would you say that Ruth is a romantic book? Why or why not?
- How are you “saving your life?” How are you losing your life for Jesus sake?

Questions for Staying on Mission

- “Redemption is the Story that God is writing in our world.” Discuss.
- What is the plot line of Redemption? How do you see it in your world?
- Redemption begins by seeing what is broken in the world. Make a list.
- How might you or your M/C bring redemption to the brokenness?
- What plans do you have for redemption this summer?

Thoughts for Parents

Once again Boaz serves as a great example of practical godliness. He is the kind of man you want your boys to become and the kind of man you want your daughters to marry! Help your kids see that Boaz is like Jesus and that we can be like Jesus, too!

- Tell your kids about Mr. Nobody and why he has no name.
- Talk about your kids names, why you named them, and your hopes for them.
- Show them why Mr. Nobody’s self-absorption is such foolishness.
- Discuss how as a family you are living for Redemptive purposes.
- Involve your kids this week in some redemptive activities.
- Are you imitable in this? Your kids are watching and following your lead!

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Suspense

Chapter 4 is the climax of our story of God’s providential care for a young widow named Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. From the tragic beginnings of this story, God has been at work behind the scenes in mysterious and veiled ways. Though he has repeatedly given hints of God’s providential care for Ruth and Naomi, the unknown author has been careful to not directly mention the activity of the Lord since 1.6. Though the story begins with foolishness, sin, and death, behind it all is an all-powerful and all loving God who has been silently guiding Ruth and Naomi to this crucial moment.

Following Naomi’s risky advice, Ruth went down to the threshing floor at midnight to lie at the feet of a worthy man named Boaz. In a scene ripe with potential for scandal, Ruth requests that Boaz propose marriage to her as a redeemer. In humble joy Boaz thanks Ruth for her kindness to him in such a request, and promises that he will do everything in his power to make her his wife. However, because he not only loves Ruth but also delights in the commands of God, Boaz identifies an obstacle to their love: another man is a closer relative to Naomi and therefore has the first right to redeem the land - and Ruth with it! The suspenseful ending of chapter 3 left us without resolution: Will Boaz find a way to both honor God’s Law and marry Ruth?

Mr. What’s His Name

As soon as dawn breaks, Boaz sends Ruth home and heads to the gates of the city, the place where the men of the city gathered to discuss issues of business, finance, and law. Just as he sits down, the other redeemer, the one who is the obstacle to Boaz’s love for Ruth, comes walking by. The narrator uses the phrase, “behold,” in order to draw our attention to the fact that, once again, God is at work behind the scenes to orchestrate this “chance” meeting.

Boaz calls the man “friend,” which is literally in the Hebrew “peloni almoni,” a rhyming phrase roughly equivalent to how we might say “Mr. So and So” or “Mr. What’s His Name.” It is a deliberate attempt by the author (for surely Boaz knows his name!) to hint at the fact that this man will not play a significant role

in God's purposes in this story. This nameless character serves as a marked contrast to the righteous strength and shrewd wisdom of Boaz.

Boaz quickly and ably assembles a quorum of 10 men in order to lay out his case and bring this issue to a quick resolution. Not only does Boaz have the character to do it righteously and the influence to do it quickly, he also has the shrewdness and strength to ensure it turns out favorably. Boaz comes into the deal with a plan, fully aware of the risk of doing it lawfully, but also seemingly aware of the character - or lack there of - of Mr. Nobody. He lays out the advantages of the deal first: Naomi is selling her land in order to survive, and Mr. Nobody has the first rights to redeem it. In this scenario, the redeemer would gain the land permanently because Naomi is past child-bearing and there is no future heir to the land to whom the redeemer must eventually pass it on. Tragically, Mr. No Name agrees to redeem the land!

Shrewd Mr. Boaz

But big bad brother Boaz is not finished yet; he will not be disappointed in this transaction! Boaz reveals to the nameless redeemer that with the land comes not just Naomi but also Ruth, and with Ruth comes the responsibility to raise up offspring in place of her deceased husband. The offspring from this marriage would later inherit the land. Mr. Nobody starts back pedaling: "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance." Because Ruth is still able to have children, there is the strong potential that Mr. Nobody would eventually lose that land to one of her offspring. His expensive investment in Naomi's land would ultimately be a loss to him as he would later pass that land to Ruth's children.

Mr. So and So is not given a name because he has chosen to exclude himself from the redemptive story that God is weaving. Surely he has known of Naomi and Ruth's plight - he is a close relative after all - but has chosen to do nothing until it seemed to his advantage. He has ignored the needs of the poor and the widow. As soon as the deal was no longer advantageous, Mr. So and So wants nothing to do with it because it is costly and without financial reward. Mr. What's His Name is primarily concerned with self-preservation and self-protection, and is therefore destined for historical oblivion: not only does he not have a name in the story, but he will never have a name in the history of God's redemption. In this we see an illustration of the way the Kingdom of God works: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my

sake will save it." Jesus teaches that the only way to real, abundant, and lasting life is to give your life away for His sake, His purposes, His ways in the world. Boaz is this kind of man as he has chosen to accept the cost of redeeming Naomi, Ruth, and the land. Boaz values obedience to God more highly than self-preservation, and because he seeks to "perpetuate the name of the dead" rather than exalt his own name, God gives him a name in the Story of Redemption that is still spoken with reverence 3000 years later. "May you act worthily... and be renowned" is literally a prayer that the name of Boaz would be famous for his selfless devotion to Ruth.

Redemption Today

This section of Ruth emphasizes that being a part of God's redemptive purposes in the world requires being the right kind of person when the moment arises. It was not enough for Boaz to simply redeem Ruth on the spot; rather, he was the kind of man who wanted to honor God through obedience in the small things, even though it meant he may not get Ruth. He entrusted himself and Ruth to God's providential care. At the same time, however, Boaz shows himself to be a wise and shrewd businessman. Trusting God does not remove our responsibility to act with wisdom and strength, particularly when something as precious as Ruth is on the line. Because Boaz is righteous, wealthy, and wise, he is both financially able and cunningly strong enough to redeem Ruth.

Boaz also reminds us that being involved with God's redemptive purposes in the world is costly. Mr. Nobody has no name because he is not a player in the redemptive purposes of God, though he had a great opportunity. We must be aware of the moments God has orchestrated for us to join his redeeming work through costly and sacrificial acts of love toward those in need.

Finally, Boaz once again points us forward to our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Just as Boaz was a near kinsman to Ruth, so Jesus became a human to be near us. Just as Boaz was able to redeem Ruth, so Jesus in remaining sinless is able to redeem us from sin. Just as Boaz was willing to redeem Ruth, so Jesus has chosen to redeem us because of his great love. Just as Boaz paid the price to redeem Ruth, so Jesus shed his own blood to redeem us. Just as Boaz loved his bride, so Jesus loved his bride, the church. Just as Boaz redeemed Ruth and the land, so Jesus has redeemed his people and all of creation. Just as the name of Boaz has become famous, so name of Jesus is the most famous and glorious name in the universe!