

A Beautiful Redemption

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: 31 January 2023

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 0 0] Well, here we are. It's the last chapter of Ruth. So let's have a, we'll have a bit of a recap, but this is the conclusion of this kind of wonderful book, this wonderful true story, which in just a few short chapters covers so much ground. There is loss, there is sorrow, there is kindness, there is hope, there is intrigue, there is suspense. I do hope it's a book that has kind of drawn us in. As we've said before, that it's a book that has helped us not just to kind of know up here, but really to feel and to appreciate the truths of the Bible and the truths about God and the gospel. And this final chapter is just a brilliant climax, an incredibly joyful and celebratory end to the book. And so the plan this morning is to kind of work our, is to have two halves. So first we'll kind of go through this chapter, work our way through the conclusion of this book and just enjoy that. So it'd be worth having your Bible open in front of you as we do that. Perhaps you know the book of Ruth really well, in which case it's good to make sure we're not missing some bits or taking anything for granted. Perhaps you don't know the book of

Ruth at all. And so it's good to make sure that we know what is happening here. And so we'll work through this chapter. And then after that, we're going to kind of come back and we'll think about what is it that this passage is teaching us, what it is showing us about God. God, who throughout this book of Ruth can at times seem like he's slightly in the background. But as we've seen before, and as we'll see again this morning, it is orchestrating and in control and sovereign over all of these things.

And particularly we'll think about what we see about the redemption that God offers us. The redemption that God offers. And really redemption is the key concept in this chapter, in chapter 4. As we work our way through, see if you just notice how frequently we come across the word redeemer or redemption and that theme that just runs throughout the passage. If you're not quite sure what that is or what that means in the Bible, that's totally fine because that's what we'll be seeing together as we work through this joyful chapter.

So as I said, it's the last chapter. We'll have a bit of a recap of the story so far. Or if you've not been with us, we can kind of bring you up to speed. And that is to say this, that so far, Naomi and Ruth have returned to Bethlehem from a place called Moab. Naomi had gone there with her family. She'd experienced tragedy as her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons have died. She comes back to Bethlehem, back into Israel, back to the promised land, as it was called, with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law. And yet at the end of chapter 1, it was a pretty sad scene.

Naomi says she feels completely empty. These two widows have returned, and yet realistically, it seems with very little prospects, with very little hope. And yet into chapter 2, we met this man, Boaz, who enters the scene, who God brings into the picture. And straight away, we can't help but notice that Boaz is just a great guy. He shows Ruth real kindness. He offers her protection and security. He provides her and Naomi with food. And then the climax of chapter 2 is that actually, it turns out this man, Boaz, is both a relative and a redeemer of Naomi and her family.

[3 : 44] A good chance to remind ourselves, what is a redeemer in this context? We'll come back to that. As we said, it's a big part of this chapter. But really, a redeemer was someone who, if a relative fell into hard times, as Naomi clearly had, the redeemer had this role of helping them out of that. It was a great part of God's law for his people, where if things went wrong for people, it wouldn't just be a kind of a downward spiral where misfortune brought poverty, and it just kind of perpetuates itself.

But actually, it was a way through which people could be lifted back up again and restored. And so as Boaz arrives as this redeemer, real hope comes into the story. And we saw that last week. Angus helped us see chapter 3, Ruth and Naomi reaching out to Boaz to see if he will take on this role of being a redeemer for them. And the way that would happen is through marriage. Again, we'll talk about that later. But we saw this kind of marriage proposal, and we saw it was good news because Boaz said yes. He said yes, he will do it. Yes, he will redeem them. And it all seemed to be going brilliantly. But then there was a twist. Yet, Boaz says, there is a redeemer closer than I.

There is someone else. There's another relative who has first refusal, or we might say the primary responsibility to act as a redeemer. And so end of chapter 3, in one way, it's fine. This redemption is going to happen one way or another. But let's be honest, as we've been following through the story, it's a bit of a downer, isn't it? We don't want it to end up with this new guy who we've never met.

We don't even know his name. By this point in the story, we are kind of Team Boaz. You know, that's, you know, Ruth and Boaz together. That's how we want things to end up. And that's not us just trying to kind of bring extra stuff into the story. That's not just us trying to turn this into, you know, Notting Hill or whatever your favorite rom-com might be. That is how the book is written.

That is how we're supposed to feel. And that brings us there into chapter 4, this kind of element of suspense. And we'll run through chapter 4 to see, well, how is this all going to work out?

[6 : 15] Chapter 4, verse 1, Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. That's not just Boaz hanging around. The gate is the place where business and meetings and legal stuff happened. And this other redeemer, this kind of nameless redeemer comes by. And Boaz, basically, he sets up a meeting. You sit here, he says he gets the elders of the city to sit here as witnesses. It's a business meeting.

And verse 3, then he, that's Boaz, said to the redeemer, Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative, Elimelech. That's Naomi's husband who died. So I thought I would tell you of it and say, buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not tell me that I may know, for there is no one beside you to redeem it. And I come after you. And he said, I will redeem it. I don't know if you feel your kind of heart sink a little bit there. At this point in the story, it seems as if our hero, Boaz, is not going to be the person who this ends up with.

This other person is kind of cutting in. Again, this isn't the ending that we've wanted. This isn't the ending that surely this book has been running towards. But we see as we continue that Boaz is still at work. There is more because he throws in this extra bit of information here. Then Boaz said, the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.

And so this man thinks he's just buying a field, a nice bit of property to add to his portfolio, a land he might be able to use to turn a bit of profit, a bit of extra harvest, a bit of extra cash.

Well, it turns out this bit of land also comes with a Moabite widow and her mother-in-law as part of the package. It's not quite what the man had been expecting as the kind of the small print, the bottom of the deal. And yet that is how redemption works here. Here's how it all kind of links in with marriage. I don't know, perhaps did you slightly kind of bristle at that language?

[8 : 35] It says, you acquire Ruth as if you were like an object to be traded. Even Boaz himself later in verse 10, also Ruth the Moabite, I have bought to be my wife. This isn't really the kind of language that we would use, is it? It's not what we expect people, especially good people like Boaz, to use about a woman as if they're a piece of property to be acquired or purchased. It's really important that we see here. That is not the case. That is not the connotation or the situation here.

This kind of terminology is not a negative thing. It's not a degrading thing. The word acquired here is actually the same word used elsewhere of God kind of rescuing his people. It's a word that means to gather in, to protect, to look after. This idea of redemption through marriage was so that women were not left alone in what was a male-dominated, a kind of strength-orientated agricultural society, but actually that they were brought in, that they were cared for, that they were looked after.

This is exactly what Ruth and Naomi have been seeking after. And more than that, the second half of verse 5, it's in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in their inheritance. It's a bit kind of complex here, but it's worth getting to grips with it. The idea, the law is that this redeemer marries Ruth, the widow or the daughter-in-law of his relative Elimelech. And he cares for, this redeemer cares for Ruth and any family like Naomi. But not only that, if they have a child together, which is the aim, then that child is counted as Elimelech's child. That is Elimelech's heir. So the property stays with Elimelech's family, with Elimelech's descendants, not this redeemer's descendants.

And so the point is actually this redeemer is not adding anything to his property. The land he has the chance to purchase because of Ruth, who comes with it, will actually go back into the ownership of Elimelech's family. That actually this redemption is a costly thing for the redeemer. And as soon as this man hears that, well, he's kind of backing out as quick as possible, isn't he? This is not a price he's willing to pay. Verse 6, then the redeemer said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it. He will not pay this price.

And it just kind of, by contrast, highlights to us even more just how great Boaz is because he is more than happy to purchase the land, to acquire Ruth as his wife, as we've seen for Ruth's benefit, for Naomi's benefit, for the benefit and future of their family name. Boaz is willing to carry out this costly redemption. And so there, verse 7 and 8, he gets given a sandal, as you do apparently, which is the way things were done back then. But you know, the point is, it's all done in the proper order. It's done in the presence of these witnesses. And there's a real sense of celebration, isn't there?

[11 : 54] These witnesses in verse 11, they bless Ruth. In verse 12, they say a blessing over Boaz. And from then on, it seems that the celebrations, the joy just goes up and up and up. Verse 13, Boaz and Ruth are married. They have a child. Again, that emphasis here, the Lord gave her conception that God is behind all of this. And then perhaps the climax of the story, this child sitting on Naomi's knee.

At the end of chapter 1, Naomi had been surrounded by the women of the village as she told them how God had dealt bitterly with her. Now, she told them how she was empty. And here she is at the close of chapter 4, a very deliberate parallel, again, surrounded by the women of the village. But here, sat with a grandchild on her lap as they celebrate the blessings that God has poured out on her.

How he has provided this redeemer, who incidentally here is Obed, the child, rather than Boaz. It is Obed who will be her redeemer as he continues her family line. And as well, these women remind Naomi how Ruth, who was somewhat forgotten by Naomi in chapter 1, Ruth is also this incredible gift, your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons. Naomi herself has moved from this emptiness of chapter 1 to this great picture of fullness at the conclusion of chapter 4, shown incredible love by God through providing this redeemer, this child as a redeemer. And also God's love for Naomi shown through Ruth's consistent, dependable love for her mother-in-law.

This is a book, as we said, with that kind of element of romance. This is a book with that marriage. This is a book with that kindness. It's actually interesting that the word love is only used once, and it is used here describing that love that Ruth has for Naomi, that love that she has demonstrated. And I think that in itself is a great reminder for us that often God shows us his love through the love that others show us. And that example, that encouragement to us as God's people to be showing God's love to others in that same way. And so it is a beautiful, it is a tender ending to this beautiful story. But actually, even after that, there's more because these last couple of verses then show how this hasn't just been an isolated story, but it's actually part of God's big story.

It says, they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. And then verses 18 to 21, repeat and expand that family tree. And we see actually in all that has been happening in this story, God has been at work because God has been providing and protecting the line that will ultimately lead to David. That is King David, Israel's greatest ever king. And in some ways, this would have been the most kind of jaw-dropping moment of all for the first ever readers of this book, that this local, this kind of small-scale story of God's love, this picture of kind of personal redemption is actually an essential step in God's big picture.

[15 : 38] His universal work of bringing about the king that his people needed, the king that would ultimately rescue his people. And for us, this conclusion is really important as well, as it means it's been right. It's been kind of legitimate, I suppose, for us to have been connecting this story of Ruth into our story and into our lives.

Because the book of Ruth itself connects into that big story of what God is doing, how God is at work in his world. And that is all of our story. That is the story that all of us live in.

And actually, it is the story that continues beyond David to Jesus, the ultimate king. We see this kind of genealogy that closes the book of Ruth. And actually, the opening pages of the New Testament, Matthew chapter 1, begins with a very similar genealogy, this family tree running through Boaz, through Obed, through Jesse, through David, all the way to Jesus. And we see actually that God is at work throughout history in bringing about his perfect plan of redemption. Redemption not just for one family, not just for these two women, although this book does show us just how much God cares for individuals. But actually, redemption for all who are lost, for all who are empty, for all who need help, for all who have strayed far from God. That redemption is available to all of us through Jesus, that redeemer that God has brought about. And throughout history, God has been working out his purposes. He has brought Jesus, who offers that redemption to everyone who trusts in him. And so having worked through that passage, and with those lenses on, I suppose, of this book deliberately connecting itself into the big picture, that big picture of salvation, that big picture ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Let's kind of go back again, and let's finish up with three implications of this chapter of Ruth that help us to see, that help us to grasp just what Jesus has done for us as our redeemer. As we see, as we said in this chapter, this incredible picture of redemption. And the first thing is this. The first thing is to say that Jesus pays the price of redemption. Jesus pays the price of redemption. Chapter 4 opened, didn't it, with this kind of nameless redeemer, this man who wouldn't or couldn't redeem, because as he said, it would impair his own inheritance. We saw how redemption is a costly thing. And we see most fully in Jesus, the one who was willing to pay that cost. Again, into the

New Testament, the apostle Peter writes that it is not with silver or gold that we're redeemed, but he says, with the precious blood of Christ. It's Jesus in his death who pays the price of our redemption.

It's Jesus in his death who pays the penalty for sin. That means that we are able to be brought back to God. Jesus was willing to pay that price of redemption. Now, why do we know that Boaz in this story is a good guy? Why have we been siding with Boaz throughout Ruth, kind of confident that he'll do the right thing? It's because throughout this book, from the very first moment we met him, he has been a model of showing costly kindness to those who didn't earn it. Remember when he was kind of pulling out extra sheaths of wheat so that Ruth had more to collect? And that kind of comes to kind of fulfillment here as he accepts this cost of redemption, this cost this other man was unwilling to pay. That's how we had confidence in Boaz. How much more can we have the ultimate confidence in Christ that he is good, that he is kind, that he is someone we can trust in, he is someone to side with because he has paid the ultimate price of redemption, even giving his own life. Our redemption was costly. And yet Christ paid that price so that we could receive it freely.

[20 : 00] And that makes all the difference, doesn't it? Whether you are considering Christianity for the first time, or perhaps you're returning to Christianity, or perhaps you've been a Christian for a long time. Now, all of us will at times hear that question in our heads. Does God really care?

Is Jesus really bothered? Especially when times are hard and we see suffering around us, that question can start to raise its voice a little bit louder. And yet when we look to the cross, we see that Jesus has paid the ultimate price of redemption. He has given his own life. And so however confusing or difficult things might get, we can know for certain his love for us. We can know that he will never let us down, that that redemption is for certain, because Jesus pays the price of that redemption.

That is done, that is dealt with, and he has done it. Jesus pays the price of redemption. The second thing then that we see is that Jesus brings us into his family through redemption. Again, this idea of redemption is huge throughout the Bible, God redeeming his people is kind of the language of purchasing people back, of paying that cost, as we've just said. But there can be perhaps a danger in our minds, or there is a danger that in our minds, this redemption becomes something that is purely legal, or purely kind of transactional. And it is true in this passage where it's clear that the price is paid, and things are done as they should be. And yet also this book of Ruth, and this chapter in particular, makes it clear that redemption is a relational thing as well. That actually we're redeemed into a family. We're redeemed into God's people. And that's why it matters that it's Boaz, not this other guy. That's why we couldn't have just stopped at the end of chapter three and said, well, that's all sorted. I don't know who she's going to end up with, but they'll be redeemed one way or the other, and that's all that matters. No, it does matter because it's relational.

Ruth is married into this family, and that's what the people celebrate in verse 11. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

Rachel and Leah were the mothers of the 12 tribes of Israel. And so this is an incredible thing to say, an incredible privilege to speak about someone. And remember, this is Ruth the Moabite that has been repeated throughout this book. The Moabites were the enemies of God's people. And yet here, Ruth is welcomed into that family, welcomed into God's people, and has a place, has a key role to play in that family. Again, as we trust in Jesus, it's not simply that our slate is wiped clean, and we're kind of sent away to go and get on with it by ourselves. No, we are brought into a family.

[23 : 08] As we are redeemed, we are also adopted as sons and daughters. We become part of the church with a place and with a role to play in that. The Christian life is far less individualistic than we often think of it. And that's a really good thing, that whatever our background, and in whatever state we come to Jesus, he welcomes us into his family. And that is an incredible privilege.

And part of that privilege is that just like Ruth, we have a part to play in that as well, that we're not only welcomed in, but we're also given a role. That as God brings us in, he also uses us to bring about his kingdom. We saw that, how these final verses of this book kind of lifted the curtain on how God is continually at work, even in the small details, bringing about this restoration through Jesus. And Ruth has that key point to play, in that family tree leading to Jesus, the Redeemer.

We are not going to find ourselves in that family tree leading to Jesus. That is done. He has come. But we're still used in that incredible way of connecting people to Jesus. We have that incredible opportunity as those brought into his family to speak about the beauty of Jesus, our Redeemer, and of the redemption that he offers, the beauty that this book of Ruth pictures so well.

We have that role to play. Jesus brings us into his family through redemption. And that leads us to our final point, which is this, that Jesus brings us fullness by redemption. Jesus brings us fullness by redemption. A lot of people, a lot of kind of biblical scholars would say, and I think I would agree with him on this, that although this book is called Ruth, it's primarily the story of Naomi.

It's primarily the journey that Naomi goes through. And as we saw, when we think of it that way, it's a story with such a happy ending. At my parents' house, there's a photograph of my gran, who has since passed away, holding her first grandchild, my nephew Joe, who is now 16 years old, holding him as a newborn baby. It's one of my mum's favourite pictures. And you can see on my gran's face that pride and that joy as she holds her grandchild. And that is the picture of Naomi, isn't it, at the close of this book of Ruth, sitting quietly, contentedly with her grandson, this grandson she never thought she would have. And remember, this is more than simply a sentimental picture. It's more than simply it being, you know, nice to have grandkids. This is the child who ultimately will be her redeemer, who will care for her, who will continue that all-important family line and their inheritance, their place in the promised land. This is the one who, as we read in verse 15, shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age. This is a great picture, as we said, of fullness. Naomi has moved from that emptiness of chapter one to fullness here because of this redemption. And again, we're able to say in an even greater way how Jesus brings us fullness by redemption. And we need to be really careful here because the fullness that Jesus offers is not to say, yes, you will be provided with that spouse that you desire. That's how you'll be fulfilled.

[26 : 58] It's not to say, no, you'll get those grandkids that you've longed after, longed for after all. We're not promised those things. And absolutely, at times, that can be painful.

But in Jesus, we are given a greater fullness because we can know that that restoration of life, we're actually being brought into God's family, we can know that we are loved, that we have purpose, that we are secure, that we have a home and a people, that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We can know that nourishment in old age, not just old age, but beyond, knowing that we can have that true security now and always because of what Jesus has secured for us, that the redemption makes possible, that we are promised eternal life as God's people.

That redemption where Jesus paid the cost, which brings us into his family, which offers us true fullness now and for all eternity. That redemption that God has been working out throughout history has brought to his glorious fulfillment in Christ. That redemption which is offered to us and that we long to share with others because, as we see in this book of Ruth, it is the greatest, it is the most beautiful, it is the most hope-bringing truth, brought about through the grace and kindness and love of a beautiful God and the perfect Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

I hope and I pray that working through this book of Ruth has helped us to see that, to grasp that, to feel that more and more so that we can live in and share the joy and the comfort and the fullness that that brings. Now let's pray together.

Cray-