

RUTH 4: HOPE IN REDEMPTION

Grab your Bibles and open them up to **Ruth 4**. Today we conclude the story of Ruth. To really understand the ending you have to have an idea of what has come before, so we'll recap the story for the sake of those who haven't been here, haven't been paying attention, or those who were here, were paying attention, and just can't remember something for a whole week. As I recap I am also going to add a few details that have always been there, but that we have not spent too much time on up to this point:

The story begins with a famine in the Promised Land. Even for God's people, in the land that he had given to them, there is pain. This earth is broken. It is broken because the people that God created decided that they knew better, that following their own desires, and chasing their own temporary happiness was more important than obeying God. When the first humans, Adam and Eve sinned, they opened up the floodgates and let sin flow in and fill the whole earth. The ground is now cursed and every person who has come after our first parents is laced with sin. Every person is in desperate need of redemption. This is not a surprise to God. Before Adam and Eve ever looked longingly at the fruit, God already had a plan for the redemption of His people. In **Genesis 3**, right in the midst of God's beautiful creation being polluted by sin, God makes a promise of redemption:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” 15*

This is the promise of a savior, a redeemer that would be born of woman and that would ultimately come to destroy Satan. This is where God first reveals that He has a plan...

But back to Ruth. In the midst of this famine, an Israelite family faces a difficult decision of what to do in the midst of this food shortage. Elimelech, the father of the house, decides to pack up and head for Moab. This is important because God's chosen people had been set apart and were not supposed to have certain kinds of relationships with other nations, including the Moabites. Rules like that make God sound bigoted; what makes Israel any better than Moab? Nothing. God makes it clear to Israel over and over again that they have done nothing special to earn this special place in his plan; they are not the point. They are special because God has chosen to work through them, and as God promised Abraham: *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*.

This family from God's people relocates to Moab. Elimelech dies, he was survived by wife Naomi and two sons Mahlon and Chilion. The boys find some nice local girls and get married. In time, the boys also die, leaving Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws to fend for themselves. Naomi decides to go back home to Bethlehem, Orpah goes home to Moab, and Ruth promises to accompany Naomi wherever she goes. Naomi and Ruth stroll in to Bethlehem, tired, alone, and struggling. Naomi cries out in despair:

I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

This is the low point of the story. But low points are only low if you stay there, and in this story, as well as our own, the low point exists to make us aware that we need help. If life is good and great, if we can handle everything on our own, than what need do we have for redemption. We need to be brought low so that we know can begin to understand the grace of God.

Back in Bethlehem, Ruth goes to work. She searches out a field that she can glean in, and she *happens upon* the field of a man named Boaz. She coincidentally ends up in the field of one of the

few people that can do something about the situation that she is in. He is a relative, a potential redeemer, and he is a man of integrity as well. Knowing Ruth's story and the tremendous love that she has shown to Naomi, Boaz blesses her with protection, easier work, food and water. Ruth is amazed and humbled at the many practical things that he has given her and expresses her thanks, understanding she deserves none of what she is receiving.

Ruth goes home and tells Naomi of how her day went and Naomi gets excited. She begins to see God's plan unfolding. But the plan seems to stall. Ruth continues to work in the fields, Boaz continues to bless her, but Naomi knows that this temporary blessing is not enough. It is great, but it does not actually provide what she and Ruth truly need, so she devises a plan. Ruth does exactly what she says. She approaches Boaz as he sleeps and lays at His feet. When He awakes to find her there, and asks who she is, Ruth asks him to redeem her and Naomi. She asks Boaz to marry her and provide a child to continue the family line, and to inherit the land of Elimelech and restore it. She can't do these things. Naomi does not have the ability to do these things. Boaz is the kinsman redeemer, he has the power to redeem them. And, we soon find out, he is willing. There is a little hitch...there is someone else who is a closer relative and gets first dibs on the redemption. So Ruth and Naomi are left with a promise, a gift/sign of the promise, but they are just waiting to see how things go.

We ended last week looking at how this story of redemption is our story of redemption. How we are hopeless and helpless and Jesus acts to redeem us. Like Naomi and Ruth, we have this promise of redemption, but if we are honest with ourselves, there are times when that promise is hard to hold on to. Even if we know what the Bible says, when we are tired, beat down by sin, suffering through a hard time, it is sometimes difficult to wait for completion. It is hard to live in this time of promise, when even our own thoughts seem to betray us. This final chapter is an encouragement to us. As we read the details of this story, we will see how our redeemer has done more than just give us blessings and the hope for the future, but also how he works to secure ALL aspects of our redemption. So let's go, **Ruth 4.1:**

THE WORK OF THE REDEEMER

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. Then he 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. 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 besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." 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." 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."

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought 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 the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."

Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the

house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman."

Boaz the redeemer wastes no time solving the predicament here. He goes to the gate to meet with the other guy. He gathers together 10 witnesses and he goes to work. He outlines the situation for this potential redeemer, including the land rights and Naomi. At that point it sounds like a pretty sweet deal. This other guy would have to put up some money for the land, but he would increase his inheritance by adding the land of Elimelech to his own. The production of Naomi's land would pay more than what was needed to take care of her, so this would be a positive investment opportunity. Other guy says: *I will redeem it.*

But the situation changes on him. Boaz says: *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.* In that moment the slam dunk investment turns into a lemon. This is no longer about putting out a small amount of effort in order to gain a lot. This just became a huge commitment. So Mr. Other guy backs out. Part of reading the Bible well is asking questions of the text. In this case, why would Boaz go about it this way? Why wouldn't he just lay out the whole plan and let this guy decide? Instead, he tricks this guy into agreeing and then backing out. I believe what we are supposed to see here is that God's economy has different benchmarks. We are supposed to see the true colors of this man so that we can accurately contrasted with the character of the redeemer.

But before we just roll this guy over by calling him a pleasure-seeking, greedy jerk, let's recognize who he really is. This guy weighs the cost and decides that he is not willing to pay. As my friend Chris mentioned as we discussed the text this week: this guy is a Dave Ramsay Financial Peace University graduate (if you don't know who/what that is, Ramsay is a Christian finance guru. He helps people plan better, save better, get out of debt...). Is that bad? NO. We are called to be stewards of what God has given us.

This guy is a good steward of what he has, IF we view it from a strictly financial standpoint. He got out of a bad business deal before it went bad. The problem is, he missed out on being part of God's deal. There is a new math at play here (those of you who struggle in math are thinking, I'm still trying to figure out the old math). The new math looks at every situation by asking the question: how can my actions in this situation bring glory to God rather than what can I get out of it? The pull of how can I benefit from this situation is one of Satan's greatest tools to pull us away from God.

We need to recognize that Satan is most effective when He uses good things to draw us away. Because I think that for many of us, we think of Satan as a crooked looking devious fellow selling crack to schoolchildren. He would certainly do that, BUT Satan is described in the Bible as beautiful. He doesn't lure us by asking if we are willing to sell our souls. Instead, he presents something before us that we desire, because He knows that it will crush our souls. The right choice is not always the righteous choice.

The Bible brings up over and over again this idea of two paths: the righteous and the wicked, the New Life and the Old Life, living in the flesh/living in the Spirit, all of these point to the same thing: that we live in a world that has systems and rules and practical ways to live, but that we are to live different. We live in the midst of all of these things, but we cannot allow them to become our hope. We are in a sea of good things, that will drown us if we don't push against them to break the surface and get a breath of fresh air. You may not do drugs, sleep around, and kick dogs, and you may think that makes you free from the desires of the flesh. You also need to push on the things that are perfectly acceptable, that no one is ever going to call you out on. Very few people will tell you that you love your family too much, that you work too hard, or that

volunteering for the church has become your functional savior. These things that will keep you from truly enjoying God and being part of His plan.

Boaz the redeemer, points forward to Jesus the Messiah, both give us a picture of a life of sacrifice. Giving things up, not foolishly, not to earn something with your grace points, but because you know that the end that you are serving is far greater than any temporary satisfaction you may get. Let's see where this new math gets us, **v.11**:

THE RANK OF THE REDEEMED

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."

Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

It is interesting how the chronology of this story plays out. The first five verses take place over the span of 10 years. Then the next 3 chapters play out over about a month, now we start spacing out again. Marriage and child get one verse (that would be at least 9 months), into the last verse here covers a few generations. In this, we see a moment in time that is shaped over a period of time and which has long term implications. It helps us to see beyond the next five minutes.

When we talk about this concept of new math, it requires, more than anything else, the belief that God is in control. Not that He will do all the work for you so that you can just do whatever you want. But that being faithful to what God has given you: loving your husband/wife, raising your kids in the Lord, working hard as unto God and not man, using whatever gifts and opportunities he has given you for His to make Him greater even as you are diminished, that doing all of these things will ultimately make you more fulfilled and joyful. That even as you make a hard decision here, or deny yourself something there, or decide to set aside what you want to serve someone else, that being faithful will, in the end, work together for your own glory.

Wait a second...I am not supposed to do things for my own glory. No, but here is the amazing thing about God's math, as the redeemer, you are glorified because of His work. What we see here is that Ruth and Naomi receive from the work of Boaz. He redeems them, changes their status, gains back their land and inheritance, provides protection and security for them, and then gives them an heir. But as we meet this heir we are supposed to see him not just as a child, a joy and a blessing, but he is also the line of royalty. This book is written during the time of David's kingship and connecting this child to David elevates Ruth and Naomi to royalty. They are glorified because of their connection to the king. This connection to David is just one more place where the author wants to remind us of God's larger plan for redemption. It is through David that God renews His promise for THE redeemer, who will come to establish His kingdom forever.

That is our story. In our redemption, God adopts us as His children. He brings us into His royal family. As part of this family we are now set to receive an inheritance. This inheritance is like nothing we have ever experienced before. It is not based on anything but Him. It exists because of Jesus. It is great because He is great. And it is *an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* **1 Peter 1.4-5.** So while we sit in this time of uncertainty, fighting our fears, doubts, weaknesses, we don't lose heart because we know that *it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* **Philippians 2.13**

There is one more thing to look at here as we close out the Book of Ruth, v.18:
Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

The interesting thing here is not the end of the geneology, but the beginning. It begins with Perez, who is mentioned earlier in the text, v.12
and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

The geneology and blessing alludes to Perez because he is the father of the Bethlehemites, but he is also the son of Judah and Tamar. The story of Judah and Tamar is not a clean one. Tamar is Judah's daughter-in-law and she dresses up like a prostitute to seduce him and he sleeps with her, becoming a father and grandfather in one night. Tamar is one of four women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus, along with Boaz's mom Rahab, the prostitute, Ruth and Bathsheeba, the woman David had an affair with and then covered up by setting up her husband's death. Interesting company. One more time, in one more way, God reminds us of His math. He takes what is despised in the world. What is worthless and weak. The things that we would scoff at and discard, and in these things builds His kingdom.

To be honest, if we read Ruth outside of the larger context it is easy to think that this is just God rewarding Ruth and Boaz with earthly blessings for their good work. In the end, they are married, they have a child, Naomi is caring for the grandchild she never thought she would have and they have no worries. It sounds so clean and perfect, almost too perfect; it seems unbelievable. It's not that God can't restore a family here on earth like this, it happens, but it is not the norm, nor is it the ultimate aim. The life we live in this sinful world is full of sin and brokenness and pain and struggle, and it would be wrong to say, just be faithful and trust in God and everything will be good. God places these reminders in front of us so that we don't terminate on this lifetime. So we don't judge this as the end.

The restoration of described in the book of Ruth represents the span of eternity, this is not just about a single lifespan. Here in the end as we see a wedding, fulfillment, peace, full restoration. In Revelation 19, we see the great marriage supper of the Lamb, the point at which His bride, the church, is presented to Jesus. That is our story. Jesus saves us. Jesus cleans us up. Jesus makes us valuable. Jesus presents us back to Himself. We get to live forever in the glory of Jesus.

As we come forward for Communion, remember the promise that Jesus made to His disciples: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. I Corinthians 11.26.* Jesus will finish what He started. While we wait on this broken world for His plan to be completed, we can be assured that He who began the good work will bring it to completion. We are not home yet, so be faithful, go to church, love one another, work hard, get married, have babies, raise your kids in the Word, but don't expect any of it to impress God. He is already impressed, and you had nothing to do with it. But the great gift of the gospel is that He is willing to freely give you this gift of redemption. The question is, are you weak enough to receive it?