

Reading: Ruth 4: 9 – 17

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!'

¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son!' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.
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Preaching notes:

When Boaz makes the announcement to the elders and all the people, they are all gathered at the city gate. In ancient Israel the city gate was far more than just the practical entry point, it was the place where important decisions were made, note in Proverbs 31-which is quoted in the preaching video in respect to Ruth being a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11)- "*Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land*" (Proverbs 31:23).

The city gate had no "break-out" rooms for privacy, no secret gatherings "behind closed doors", it was an open space for bringing issues out "into the open" (perhaps that is where this phrase originates). Note that in verse 2 of chapter 4, just prior to our selected passage, Boaz "took" or "enlists" ten men of the elders in wanting to discuss the matter of Ruth, Naomi and Elimelech's property with the "closer next of kin of whom Boaz had spoken".

Commentaries vary in the way of translating and understanding whether the land in question had already been sold (perhaps by Elimelech when they originally left Bethlehem to make a fresh start in Moab) or was to be sold (in the present tense) in either event the "nearest kin" agrees to redeem the land until he discovers it comes with Ruth whereupon he withdraws. Here we see the hand of God at work in the same way as with Orpah, the daughter in law who did not make the journey from Moab, an initial good intention but an unwillingness to make the full commitment.

As the right to redeem the land and remaining family of Elimelech passes to Boaz he announces to the gathered crowd "you are all my witnesses..." he emphasises the significance of what he is committing to do, singling out the fact he will take Ruth, Mahlon's widow, as his wife, this is the last time she is referred to as "the Moabite", her redemption is complete, she is now fully accepted.

It is important not to miss the pronounced blessings within these passages. Firstly, we have the blessing, in the name of God, pronounced over Boaz by a leading elder at the gate (verses 11 and 12) referencing the two wives of Jacob and the family of Perez (see Genesis 38). As a way of highlighting the importance of "the family of Perez" we see the genealogy of Boaz beginning with Perez and leading to Jesse the father of David, who was to be made Israel's King. The genealogy in Matthew 1 carries this line through to Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Secondly, the women pronounce a blessing over Naomi (verses 14 and 15). This is after the birth of the son born to Boaz and Ruth. "Praise be to the Lord..." the baby, named Obed, is foreseen as one who will renew the life of Naomi and sustain her in her old age, Ruth is highlighted by the women as one who is "better to Naomi than seven sons".

We must not miss that within this amazing story of love, loyalty, faithfulness and obedience is a parallel story of our own redemption. Jesus is our Redeemer, He restores us from an empty way of life (1 Peter 1: 18,19) to a fullness, a wholeness that can only be provided through a relationship with Him. Naomi, in chapter 1 of Ruth, talks of "leaving full and returning empty",

she is overcome with tears and bitterness because of her circumstances but God had not left her, nor had He dealt bitterly with her. God's promises are the same then as they are now, through the coming of His Son Jesus to the very place that this story of Ruth takes place – Bethlehem (the house of bread, the house of provision).

As Ruth and Boaz marry, it is a picture or a foretelling to us of the Church, being prepared as the spotless/sinless bride for Christ, the bridegroom and the redeemer (Revelation 19:7-8, Ephesians 5: 25-27, Matthew 25: 1-13 and Revelation 21:1-2).

What joy for us to know that God is working in our lives, it is often only we look back at situations that we see His hand, deliberately and lovingly guiding our path.

God is active today in our lives, as believers, just as much as He was for Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. Three individuals, bound together by grief, hope, integrity and finally joy who God brought together to fulfil His purpose, a purpose that is still wholly relevant and active today.

Amen