

The Redemption Ruth 4

Leviticus 25: 1-17
Leviticus 25: 18-38
Psalm 28: 1-9

This morning we are going to be looking at chapter 4 which is the last chapter in this little book of Ruth. Here we will see the culmination of this story, God granting Ruth legal redemption in Bethlehem in the marriage of Boaz, making her accepted among the people of God, an Israelite by marriage through the kinsman-redeemer rite. This was the process of care for widows within the Jewish society, and this was the process of the land ownership as well, a right of succession of who was given control over the land, and protection of the family line. As we had talked about a few weeks ago, there was not a lot of opportunities of women in those days, it was not like today. So the tradition, or rite of kinsman-redeemer was a way of provision for those who had lost their husbands. It was the men who were the legal heads of households, who would have been land owners, and the providers for the family. In the case of a husband's death, left the widow with little options in that ancient society, so seeking provision and protection from the husband's next of kin was customary, and a part of the Levite law and tradition.

We don't know for sure what had happened to Elimelech's land, whether he sold it before leaving to Moab, or if this was just a case of ownership and control since neither Naomi, or Ruth would be recognized as the owners of it. As we read in Leviticus this morning, this process of land ownership, the whole thing reads more like temporary rentals than true ownership, for the previous owners have the ability to redeem their own land. If sold, or every 49 years was the year of Jubilee where the land would be sold or given back to the previous owner. As it said in Leviticus 25:38, this Land was God's land, he set the rules, he set the limitations, and those who dwell on it were caretakers. This system of land ownership showed that God was the ultimate owner, and the Israelites were just the trustees or caretakers. As we know, much of the old testament is shadows and mirrors to instruct and to show us, and the people of that time some truth or revelation about God. This points to the temporary nature of life, and the reality that we are all sojourners traveling to our final place. Because God was recognized as the true owner of all things, the land could not be sold permanently, but was based on the amount of harvests until the Jubilee, when the land would automatically return back to the original owner.

Before the year of Jubilee, the land could be bought, sold, and traded, with the next in kin having first dibs as it were to redeem the land for the family. If one was forced to sell the land due to poverty, the nearest relative had the right, and responsibility to buy it back on their behalf. Then on the 49th year, all land was returned, there was a reset which was designed to prevent any permanent loss of family heritage.

Let us go ahead and read this morning this last chapter. (read chapter 4) So we see here in this chapter, the redemption of the land, and the continuation of Elimelech's family line through this legal transaction. In biblical times, the city gate area represented a place of political authority, and legal authority as they were the area which was the central hub for life within that city. Usually situated just inside was the market area, and close by in the surrounding areas was usually the courts, and the housing of the city elders. This was the common gathering spot of the city elders and judges as they would mediate disputes, conduct business transactions and make official announcements. All of these

things which Boaz intended to do as he met up with the other relative to discuss the purchasing of Naomi's land, and the marriage of Ruth.

As we see in this account, as Boaz went to the gate to conduct this business, meeting up with the other family member and gathering together 10 of the cities elders. During this discussion it becomes apparent that this closer relative doesn't want to take on the societal risk of marrying the Moabite woman, for when he is first presented with the offer to buy up Elimilech's land which had been sold, he agreed, but the moment that such a transaction required the marriage of Ruth, he declined for he said in verse 6, "I cannot redeem it for myself, in case I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it." This transaction in the presence of the town elders was a legal binding agreement, Boaz had presented this closer family member with the knowledge and opportunity that was given because of his status as next of kin, but he chose to wave his right, in favor of his own inheritance. There was definitely risk involved, Ruth being this gentile, Moabite woman carried with it the stigma, and curse which we have previously talked about.

It is also speculated that he may have already had his own children, and producing an heir with Ruth as was the expectation of this transaction would have also changed the inheritance of his own family, he would then have to divide his existing estate with a new heir, and supporting both Ruth and Naomi may have been a financial burden he was not willing to take on. There was a willingness to accept this offer, until there became risk. In either way, whether it was the avoidance of the financial burden, and the splitting of his inheritance further, or the social stigma and issues he believed that would arise from marrying a Moabite. We see a contrast here in motives, for this kinsman who refused was willing to oblige the redemption of the land, for it would have benefited his own self interest, but when it came to the marriage of Ruth that was another story. In Boaz we see the contrast where he is less interesting in the land, but more interested in the care for the widows. Some biblical scholars have taken this as an example of the obligation of the law, verse the provision of grace and I don't think they are wrong in seeing that here.

This is a legal transaction, with sacrifice, with risk, requiring faith, having a willingness to risk personal prosperity in the care of another. The old covenant law brought obligation, it was a cold ritualistic process, but Christ in establishing the new covenant in his own blood, took that risk upon himself, out of love for us. He was not just following some obligation, nor did he give of himself in such a way out of selfish gain, but he gave of himself out of love for us, so that we, these outsiders, like Ruth with Boaz could be made perfect, could be redeemed and brought into the very household of God, to sit at his table. Ruth, would be made a part of the Israelite people through this legal transaction, no longer recognized as a Moabite, but would be a daughter of Bethlehem, just as we are no longer recognized as sinners in the eyes of God, through the transaction that took place on the cross.

This right of redeeming of the land, acts as a foreshadow of mankind at its own redemption needs. In the case here in Ruth, we see an inheritance that has been sold, the land has been lost but there was always a provision that a close family member could buy it back, redeeming it back to the family inheritance. Likewise, humanity through Adam was sold into the slavery of sin, lost in sin, separated from our spiritual inheritance. But Jesus, the Son of God, the promised Messiah came to redeem us, by taking on human flesh and becoming like us, willingly giving of himself to die in our place, to pay that price to free us from this curse, this slavery to sin that has befallen all who are born of the flesh. Christ became this redeemer, this close relative as we have been adopted into the family of God, having been redeemed from our sinful nature, giving a new life in him, being recognized by God

through Jesus' blood, as his own children. This new birth, is the moment that we have been brought from death to life.

Under the curse, we are dead, dead in our sins, dead in our trespasses, dead in our ability to see and to know God. But this new birth is our own personal redemption, being brought back into the inheritance we were first made to be a part of, it is a reconciling, and ending of the curse brought upon mankind through Adam's own rebellion. As we read this morning in Leviticus, about the land rights and the year of the Jubilee....the new birth is our redemption, though Christ we have been brought back to what we were meant to be, one with God, free from the penalty of sin, brought from death to life. The inheritance has been bought back, what was owned by Satan through the curse, our life and our soul, has been purchased by God, redeeming us again into that inheritance. In this old testament practice of redeeming the land, and the family to their inheritance this family member would pay the price to restore the family's property, as Paul points out in Ephesians, the Holy Spirit is the down-payment of our redemption.

Ephesians 1:7 Paul writes, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to the good pleasure which he purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth, in him. In him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. In him ye also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the holy spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory." We live in an already not yet state, we have been redeemed, but it has not yet been fully realized in our lives, so we have been giving the holy spirit as a down-payment of that redemption, a helper who instructs, and convicts, who draws us close to God, who opens our eyes and ears to discern and to learn, and who keeps us through the conviction of sin until our redemption is one day fully realized when our soul is released from this mortal body.

In verse 7 we see a tradition that is foreign to us in the exchange of this kinsman-redeemer right. This custom, was binding as a handshake, or a contract would be within our own society. Verse 7 says, "Now this was the custom in the former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything, one man took of his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel." Looking into this a bit this past week, what I have found is that this custom was an agreement symbolizing a transfer of ownership and a binding contract. The concept is that your feet is associated with treading on and possessing land, therefore giving ones sandal to another is symbolizing giving that person the right to walk on, and claim that property. This was as legally binding in that day, as any contract we would sign today, such an act was like a finalized bill of sale. It provided public, and legal proof that this deal was done.

In the account here, this close relative who was unable to purchase the land and marry Ruth takes of his sandal and gives it to Boaz as we see in verse 8, he was relinquishing his legal claim, his right of which he had as the next in kin to redeem the land. This was done in public, in front of the elders of the town so there were many witness. Boaz now had the right to redeem the inheritance of

Elimelech, to bring the land back into the family, and to perpetuate their offspring into future generations. Verse 9 “And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, You are my witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among this brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day.”

Again we see a picture of our redemption in Christ, who gave of himself publicly, as he purchased us out of the spiritual bankruptcy and sin, and brought us into his family. We who were dead, were made alive and giving an inheritance in the kingdom of God. There really isn’t a whole lot more to be said here, While Boaz gives us an early picture of this idea of redemption, it is fully realized in what Christ has done, and the whole world awaits the day of the fulfillment of this redemption which as already taken place, as we read last week in Roman’s 8...Paul says, “all of creation groans together in the pains of childbirth, awaiting that redemption.” Through this marriage transaction, Boaz brought Elimelech’s inheritance back in line, the land was back in the family, and Ruth would bear a child continuing on the dynasty of her husband. In Christ we have been given the new birth, we have been born again as new creatures who have put away the old things, the sins of the flesh, and are now born in the newness of the spirit. Just like childbirth is a painful transition, all of creation is in this moment, the struggles of life, the temptations of sin, the pain of death as we grow older...waiting, waiting for that day of redemption when all things will be made new, where there is no more pain, no more suffering, no more corrupting nature of sin, just pure mercy and grace realized as we enter into the very presence of our Father, as his redeemed children, bought back from the slavery of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus.

We are where Ruth was in chapter 3, having a marriage proposal, but awaiting the return of Boaz. So to it is with us, Christ has come, accomplished our redemption upon the cross, but we are just awaiting his return, where we will be brought up into the marriage supper of the lamb, and our redemption will be fully realized. But until that day, we wait, we remain faithful, and we live our lives as those who have been justified, putting away sin, pursuing righteousness, and declaring the gospel, because that is who we are now in Christ. The redeemed, awaiting the return of our savior.