

WOULD THE TRUE REDEEMER PLEASE STAND UP?

PART I

Ruth 4:1-12

*REDEMPTION IS THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL
BELIEVERS.*

WE ARE CALLED TO BE CHRIST-LIKE

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WOULD THE TRUE REDEEMER PLEASE STAND UP? (Part I)

RUTH 4:1-12

I don't know about you, but I'm emotionally spent as I read and study through the book of Ruth. The story starts out with a wealthy and influential family temporarily moving out of the country to avoid a drought. What started out as a temporary move, turned out to be a permanent move. While there, the two sons married local women. Things seemed to be good, until all three men died. This left 3 widows to fend for themselves.

Next, Naomi decided to return home to Israel , only we are surprised by her negative attitude once she returns home. Ruth miraculously finds a good work situation and it turns out that the field she ends up working in belongs to a family member.

Ruth then pulls off this dangerous and risky plan. She asks Boaz to marry her. He agrees. However, there is a small problem. There is another relative that is one step closer and has the first option to buy the land.

This morning we will see how the story further develops. But this is truly a roller-coaster ride. The word *redemption* appears all over this morning's text. It describes redemption of land, redemption of people, redemption of history, and kinsman-redeemers.

I think that we often forget that we are part of God's redemption of this world. In other words, when God redeemed us, that was just the beginning of our new life. We are now to participate in God's redemptive plan.

But we are not really good at picking up on responsibilities. I'm kind of the same. And I'm kind of ashamed to admit that I don't often fulfill my responsibilities as a citizen. I have tried to avoid jury duty at all cost. My reasons of course are moral since I don't believe there is such a thing as justice in the judicial system.

However, I kind of realized that I am a hypocrite when I heard another prospective juror questioned. Before the presiding judge ever had a chance to ask her a question, the woman said, "I am not qualified to serve because I don't believe in capital punishment."

The judge said, "You don't understand lady. This is a civil case involving a man who spent five thousand dollars of his wife's money on gambling and other women." To which the woman replied eagerly, "I'll be happy to serve, Your Honor, and I've changed my mind about the death penalty."

You see, I think we only think about our responsibility when it directly affects us or something that we are passionate about. I hope that by the time we finish the book of Ruth, we will be as passionate about redemption as God is.

It is easy to get caught up in the immediate story of Ruth. In other words, Ruth and Naomi were redeemed from financial and social ruin by an honorable man. However, there is national and historical redemption going on here as well.

The "Times of the Judges" were chaotic times in Israel's social, economic, and religious life. They were oppressed by other nations, and they often chased after foreign gods. But through Ruth and Boaz, the grandfather of King David was born. King David would unite the kingdom, defeat all their enemies, and restore proper worship. King David was the redeemer of Israel.

Actually, the primary redeemer of Israel was God. He was the prototype when He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. He made them a nation and brought them safely into the Promised Land. But Israel always looked forward to the day when God would redeem them once and for all. They looked forward to the redeemer, Jesus Christ. Jesus redeemed all of humanity for all time. He comes from the line of Ruth and Boaz.

And Jesus is our Redeemer. Jesus is not finished redeeming this lost and hurting world. He calls us to be part of the redemption process. We are to redeem the earth. We as believers should be concerned about ecology. We are called to redeem the oppressed. In other words, we should be concerned about justice. We are to redeem the poor. We should be feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. We should be redeeming the broken. We should be praying for healing and restoration. We should be visiting the sick. And we should be bringing the wonderful message of God's redemption of sinners to the lost. Redemption includes bringing salvation, dignity, healing, wholeness, and justice to the lost and hurting in this world.

Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **REDEMPTION IS THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL BELIEVERS. WE ARE CALLED TO BE CHRIST-LIKE.** Did you ever think about this? We are going to be rewarded in Heaven. We are not going to be rewarded for being good. We are going to be rewarded for our participation in God's redemptive process in the world. **REDEMPTION IS A PRIVILEGE** in the sense that God provides us with opportunities to work with Him. **REDEMPTION IS A RESPONSIBILITY** because we are ambassadors of Christ.

Let me just summarize where we are. Who and what is in need of redemption? By the information we get in this chapter, it appears that Naomi's husband, Elimelech, either sold or leased his land before going to Moab. According to Hebrew law,

Naomi would have the right to take back the land or buy it back. But she had no money or no way to work the land to make it productive. The land needs to be redeemed. Naomi could redeem it. If she couldn't, then her nearest relative had the first right of redemption.

Secondly, Naomi is in need of redemption. Since her husband and sons died, she has no legitimate heir. Without a male heir, she is kind of left out there, with no help. Naomi is in need of Redemption. Who will be Naomi's kinsman-redeemer? Certainly Ruth has been a redeemer to Naomi. Ruth has saved her from starving. Ruth has made money for them and now they enjoy a measure of freedom and dignity. Boaz will be a redeemer in the sense he is willing to buy the land and give both Ruth and Naomi a home. Obed, the son born to Ruth and Boaz becomes Naomi's legitimate heir and thereby becomes her redeemer. And let's not forget God's hand in all of this. God is the ultimate redeemer. Again we come back to this theme of God's complete sovereignty and our free will. Actually all these people, together with God play an important part in redemption.

As we study through this chapter, try and keep in mind that there are parallels to chapter 1. Naomi is compared to Boaz. Orpah is compared to this unnamed kinsman-redeemer, and Ruth will be herself.

I. REDEMPTION IS A PRIVILEGE

We Have Been Given The Privilege Of Working Together With Jesus In Bringing Wholeness To This Broken World.

Verses 1-4 describe redemption as a privilege. In other words, **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF WORKING TOGETHER WITH JESUS IN BRINGING WHOLENESS TO THIS BROKEN WORLD.** Here is what we need to keep in mind. We were all born into the slavery of sin, Satan, and death. With that lifestyle came fear and alienation. Jesus shed His blood so we could be rescued, saved, and forgiven for our sins. But there were human beings involved in our redemption. Someone had to tell us about Christ. Someone led us to Christ. Ruth and Boaz' faithfulness kept the Messianic line alive. The Apostles gave their lives for

the writing and the spreading of the Word. Jesus and many faithful Christians throughout history gave their lives so we could find Christ and be redeemed. Now it is our time to pick up the cause. Jesus calls you. He calls me to be part of this redemptive process in the lives of others.

A. BEING PROACTIVE (1)

Being part of God's redemptive work requires us to be proactive as verse 1 illustrates. Last week, Boaz sent Ruth home. He said he would take care of the legal matters. Naomi advised Ruth to wait patiently because Boaz was an honorable man. Naomi said, "Boaz is not the kind of guy to procrastinate. He would pursue the matter quickly." And sure enough, at the crack of dawn, we find Boaz sitting at the city gate. Everyone would have to pass out of the gate as they went to work in the morning.

The words, *sit*, *sit down*, *sat*, and *seated* pepper these 4 verses. This has to do with legal matters. All legal business required elders of the city to make judgments and ratify all agreements. In fact, legal matters were tried at the city gate. Boaz is waiting for the opportunity to make sure Ruth and Naomi are permanently taken care of. Boaz is not leaving anything to chance. He is proactively waiting for this guy who has the first right to redeem the property. When this fellow appears, Boaz calls him over to the city gate for a legal matter. The guy accepts. Notice that the appearance of this guy doesn't catch Boaz by surprise. Boaz is waiting for him.

I have mentioned this before, but I think it's worth mentioning again, because I'm embarrassed to say that I have not made much progress in this area. As I look back on my day in my evening reflection, I find that I have missed many opportunities for ministry. And the problem is that I am not proactive. I don't pray for opportunities and I don't pray for the ability to recognize them. In other words, I often wait for things to happen to me rather than pursue the things I know God wants me to do. I think I'm doing better at home and in my marriage so let me give you an example from home.

In most of our marriages, both the husband and wife are working. Men, do you recognize this and help your wives with the cooking, cleaning, washing, and other household chores? I know that my wife is busy with work and caring for her father. So when I get home at night, my wife has usually fallen asleep on the couch. The

kitchen table and sink are filled with dirty dishes. So before I even change my clothes, I clean the kitchen so when she gets up to go to work the next morning, she can wake up to a clean kitchen. I try to grill outside for her so she doesn't have to cook so often in the summer.

B. BEING ALERT (2-4)

As believers, we need to be proactive, on the lookout for opportunities to serve. Developing a rich prayer life makes us proactive in attitude. But we need to carry it a step further. As verses 2 through the first half of verse 4 point out, we need to be alert when these opportunities present themselves so we don't let them slip away.

Immediately Boaz convenes the court by getting a legitimate quorum of elders together. He rounds up 10 elders and has them sit down before they even have a chance to get their coffee. Boaz wants this done legally.

Boaz approaches this kinsman-redeemer who has the first shot at the land. He says, "Friend, you remember our relative, Elimelech. He died, and his widow has come back from Moab. She is selling her rights to the land. According to law, you have the first opportunity to buy it. If you want to buy it, then buy it. If not, let me know because I am next in line, and I would like to buy it."

Now keep this in mind. Neither one of these men are obligated to buy the land. If they were Elimelech's brothers, and if Elimelech and Naomi had been living in Israel with them, they would have been obliged to take Naomi on as a wife, have relations with her, and produce a male heir for her. That is, if they were young and had all been living in close proximity. However, in this case, none of that applies. The simple law of who stands next in line to buy the land is at issue.

Being patient is a virtue that Boaz possesses in verse 4. He is willing to wait and let the guy make up his mind. I'm thinking, "Whew, it's all over." The guy will say, "I'm not interested, Boaz will take the land, and everyone will live happily ever after."

C. BEING PATIENT (4)

Not so fast. Look at the last sentence in verse 4. The guy says, "Fine, I'll buy it." What!? Where did that come from? I'm shocked. This is not what I expected. If I

were Boaz, I would be nuts right about now. However, if we think about it, it may seem like a great deal to this guy. Naomi is too old to have any more children. If he buys this land, it will be his and become part of his portfolio. He will acquire more land and he will annex it to his estate. It will become part of his children's inheritance. It is a good deal.

I know me. I would have immediately become discouraged. I may have even said a few four-letter words. However, Boaz must have been familiar with Yogi Berra's philosophy, "It ain't over 'til it's over."

I think that we must learn to develop a proper balance between being alert, proactive, and patient. We must always be living holy and prayerful lives so that we can be in tune with God's plans for our lives. We must be alert and ready to act when God presents us with situations for ministry.

However, we must also be patient and respectful. We must allow people to make their own decisions, whether they are good or bad. We must be patient enough to allow God to complete the work He started in the individual. Being alert and proactive make us available for ministry. Being patient prevents us from being manipulative, judgmental, or annoying. That is a real challenge. We must work towards that balance because **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF WORKING TOGETHER WITH JESUS IN BRINGING WHOLENESS TO THIS BROKEN WORLD.**

I think that deep down we all want to be a hero of some sort. I would encourage all of us to spend time in prayer asking God to show us what a privilege we have to be part of the redemption story. We can pray for one another, we can encourage one another, we can challenge one another, we can help one another financially, and do so many things. But we have to be proactive, alert, and patient. God has great plans to redeem this world and He has made you and me part of that plan. That's exciting.

II. REDEMPTION IS A RESPONSIBILITY

*Jesus Commands Us To Complete The Work He Started Here On Earth.
That Is Our Purpose As The Church.*

As verses 5-8 point out, redemption is not only a privilege, it is a responsibility. In other words, being part of the redemption process is not a suggestion or one of our options. **JESUS COMMANDS US TO COMPLETE THE WORK HE STARTED HERE ON EARTH. THAT IS OUR PURPOSE AS THE CHURCH.** Jesus commands us to go into all the earth and make disciples of all nations. Jesus told us to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. Jesus told us that as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will do great things.

A. KNOWING THE COST (5)

But if we are going to be Christ's disciples, we must know the cost as described in verse 5. Boaz says, "That's great. But just so you know what the full cost of the deal is, let me lay it out for you. You see, Naomi was married to our cousin Elimelech. Elimelech died and so the right to the land passed to his sons. His son Mahlon married Ruth. Mahlon died and now his widow Ruth has asked for Levirate marriage redemption. In other words, marrying Ruth and producing an heir with her is part of the deal."

Now here is what's going on. Both Boaz and this unnamed relative can either take the deal or walk away from the deal. The deal is this. Whoever buys the land must agree to marry Ruth and produce a male child for her. The child will not belong to Ruth's husband but to Ruth, Naomi, and their dead husbands. Therefore the land will ultimately go to the male child.

B. COUNTING THE COST (6)

In verse 6, this unnamed relative starts to count the cost. He says, "Let me see, I will be paying money for a piece of land that will never be mine. I will be fathering a child that will never be mine. If I have other children with this woman, then they will be entitled to inherit a portion of my estate. And add to that, I will have to feed and clothe this woman and children. I think I'll pass on this deal."

Sometimes I think that we do not paint an accurate picture of the Christian life. We think that becoming a Christian solves all our problems. It should make us feel good. It makes life smooth. So many Christians come to church week after week, year after

year, so they can feel good.

Listen to the words of Jesus,

"²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'" Matthew 16:24 (NIV).

Yes, when we come to Christ we are rescued from the slavery of sin, Satan, and death. However, we are set free in order to set others free. If we want to truly be Christians then we must first lay down our lives. In other words, we must reject worldly thinking and worldly desires. We must die to this world and we must die to selfishness. Next we must pick up our cross.

This unnamed relative realized that it would cost him time, money, and energy to redeem the land and Ruth. He passed on the opportunity. Redemption cost Jesus His life. The birth of the church cost the apostles their lives. Having a Bible that we can read and understand cost many people their lives throughout history. To be a real Christian means that we become part of the redemption story.

The unnamed relative told Boaz, "I cannot redeem it. You redeem it yourself." Being involved in the Christian life will cost us time, energy, money, and emotion. It is not easy to participate in the redemption of the world. We would rather keep our noses clean, obey the rules, and mind our own business, but that's not what being a Christian is all about.

C. ABSORBING THE COST (7-8)

Being a Christian and being part of God's plan of redemption means that we are willing to absorb the cost like Boaz does in verses 7-8. The transaction is now made legal. The unnamed relative removes his sandal, and says to Boaz, "Redeem it for yourself." The original ceremony of this kind of transaction had a negative connotation to it. If a brother refused to help out his dead brother's widow by redeeming her land, marrying her, and giving her children, the widow would pull off the guy's sandal and spit in his face. It would be a public disgrace. He would then be known from that day forward as "the brother who refused to care for his dead brother's widow." Here there is no

public humiliation. Boaz provided the guy with an honorable way out from the beginning. Boaz had made his desires known from the beginning.

Let me just pause here. Redemption costs a lot without getting much in return. Boaz will lose money in order to buy back Naomi's field. The field will never belong to him because he intends to marry Ruth and the field belongs to the first male child. Even though this child that he will father is his blood, the child will belong to Naomi who is not a blood relative to the child or to Boaz. The redeemer gives up everything to provide redemption.

However, let's just think for a moment about the guy who passed on the option to become the redeemer. His name is never mentioned. In a culture where names are so important, this guy goes down in history as a nobody.

Secondly, he misses the prosperity and the status that will follow this union. He will not become an ancestor of the great King David and the ultimate Redeemer, Jesus. And further, he will miss out on having Ruth as a wife.

Boaz knew what was right, what was true, noble, beautiful, and honorable. It would cost him a great deal of worldly wealth. However, he goes down in history as the great-great-grandfather of King David and he is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ forever. And I'm sure life was good with a noble woman such as Ruth.

We often miss the blessings in life because we are focused so much on the things of this world that we think will make us happy, that we are blinded to all the blessings God has for us in the future. Please learn to know the cost, to count the cost, and to absorb the cost because when our values and priorities are right, we will experience spiritual blessings that we cannot even begin to imagine or count. Let's keep our purpose in life in focus. **JESUS COMMANDS US TO COMPLETE THE WORK HE STARTED HERE ON EARTH. THAT IS OUR PURPOSE AS THE CHURCH.** Our purpose is not to find a wife or husband. Our purpose is not to climb the corporate ladder. Our purpose is not to be on society's "A" list. Our purpose is not to amass a fortune. Our purpose is not to find a boyfriend, a girlfriend, or to be popular or well-liked. Our purpose in life is to partner with God in the redemption of people and the rest of creation.

III. REDEMPTION IS CELEBRATION

We Need To Understand That All Of Heaven Celebrates When One Person Finds Wholeness In Jesus Christ.

Finally, maybe now we can let out a sigh of relief! It's all over but the party. Verses 9-12 demonstrate that redemption is a cause for celebration. In other words **WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT ALL OF HEAVEN CELEBRATES WHEN ONE PERSON FINDS WHOLENESS IN JESUS CHRIST.** Jesus told 3 parables in Luke 15.

In the first parable, a shepherd found a lost sheep. When he found it, he called all of his neighbors and friends to celebrate. In the next parable, a woman found a lost coin that was very valuable. When she found it, she called her friends and neighbors to celebrate. In the last parable, a prodigal son finally came home. When his son came home, the father threw a huge celebration party. Jesus said that when each person comes to wholeness and salvation, all of Heaven throws a party. Redemption is important to God.

A. LIVING TESTIMONIES (9-10)

In verses 9-10 we see what the Apostle Peter meant by living testimonies. Boaz announced to all the elders and to all present that he was going to redeem the land, Ruth, and Naomi. He made his intentions public. In a time in Israel 's history when there was not much respect for God's laws and God's desires, here is a living example of what God wants from us. Think about this. Ruth was an outsider. She was a Moabite. Yet she displayed God's idea of loving-kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi. Even though not obligated in any way, Ruth stuck close to Naomi and cared for her. Boaz had no legal obligation to care for Ruth or Naomi. But Boaz redeemed the land and married Ruth so God's gift of land to each Hebrew family could remain in Naomi's family. Boaz demonstrated God's loving-kindness to Ruth and Naomi. It took a Jew and a non-Jew to demonstrate to God's chosen people what it meant to love God and to love one's neighbor.

Jesus commands us to be living testimonies by loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love one another as He has loved us. This is not love the way the world defines love. This is that redemptive kind of love; the faithful loving-kindness described in the book of Ruth. The Apostle Paul said that we are to offer our bodies as holy and living sacrifices to God. In other words, we are to be living lives of redemption. Boaz and Ruth have clearly demonstrated what kind of sacrificial love God wants of us. They are truly living testimonies of God's nature and character.

I pray that my life will model that type of loving-kindness although I think that because my nature tends to be selfish and self-centered, I have a long journey ahead of me. I hope that as we have studied through Ruth that you too will try to model your lives after that type of loving-kindness.

B. JOYFUL WITNESSES (11-12)

If we do, then there will be plenty of joyful witnesses around us like the ones in verses 11-12. When justice is done, when loving-kindness is demonstrated, God is glorified and people rejoice. Lives have been saved. And once people see people act with nobility, honor, and loving-kindness, they recognize that God is Who He says He is and His people are who they say they are.

I think one of the most devastating things in life is to see Christians who are angry, nasty, impatient, and judgmental. How can they say they're Christians? Jesus is our Kinsman-redeemer. He is kind, loving, gracious, merciful, and engaging. Jesus said that people would identify us as His followers by the way we demonstrate loving-kindness towards one another. When you read the word *love* in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, keep this word *loving-kindness* in mind.

Let me just quickly go over the blessing in verse 11. First the townspeople ask Jehovah to build up Ruth and Boaz' home like Rachel and Leah's. Rachel and Leah gave birth to the 12 tribes of Israel . Rachel gave birth to Joseph. Joseph saved the Hebrew nation from starvation and extinction by rising to the second in command in Egypt . Leah gave birth to Judah, from whom King David and the Messiah Jesus would be born. These were all famous redeemers.

Secondly, they pronounce nobility on the couple. That word *standing* means nobility. Ruth and Boaz have already demonstrated their nobility in character. Here the townspeople publicly acknowledge that.

Thirdly they ask again that Ruth and Boaz give birth to famous and strong offspring. We will discuss Perez more next time. There are a lot of redemption issues in his family as well.

The point is this. People cannot see God. All they can see is God living in us. As we demonstrate loving-kindness to one another and people we meet, they will be able to see Who God is and what He is like. I hope that we as a church body have the same attitude of Jesus. **WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT ALL OF HEAVEN CELEBRATES WHEN ONE PERSON FINDS WHOLENESS IN JESUS CHRIST.**

Redemption is something that is very important and close to the heart of God. He redeemed the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt . He made them a nation and gave them a land. Jesus came down from Heaven, took on human flesh, suffered and died so that we could be freed from our slavery to sin, Satan, and death. We are called to partner with God as He redeems creation and people. **REDEMPTION IS THE PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL BELIEVERS. WE ARE CALLED TO BE CHRIST-LIKE.**

IV. EPILOGUE

We have the power of the gospel that sets people free. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to bring healing and wholeness to this lost and hurting world. However, the gospel is only powerful and effective when it is used. I don't know who wrote this story, but it illustrates that even though we have the power and the authority to redeem, we must be willing to use it.

A soap manufacturer and a pastor were walking together down a street in a large city. The soap manufacturer casually said, "The gospel you preach hasn't done much good, has it? Just observe.

There is still a lot of wickedness in the world, and a lot of wicked people too!"

The pastor made no reply until they passed a dirty little child making mud pies in the gutter. Seizing the opportunity, the pastor said, "I see that soap hasn't done much good in the world; for there is much dirt, and many dirty people around."

The soap manufacturer replied, "Oh, well, soap is only useful when it is applied."

And the pastor said, "Exactly, so it is with the gospel."

We know that we are to be sacrificially loving and serving one another. We know we are to bring the gospel to the unsaved. We know we are to be feeding the poor, clothing the naked and visiting the sick. We know we are to be welcoming strangers and working for justice. We know that Jesus said to do these things and that He will be with us forever. Yet for some reason, we go on day after day, week after week, year after year, doing nothing, and remaining like the unnamed kinsman-redeemer in the book of Ruth.

Today, let us take our role of redeemer seriously, because God does.

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