

Ruth 4

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[0 : 0 0] Alright, well we're going to welcome to Winchester Community Church we're going to look back at our passage I'm going to try to be a bit more informal because we're all sitting here and so, I don't know, feel free to even interrupt me if you have a question, but if I don't answer it it's probably because I don't know the answer then I'll pull the, this is a sermon card so we're looking at we're looking at the book of Ruth which is something I'm dropping in on but something that you guys have been doing for I assume for three weeks I bet you've been looking at a chapter a week and what we have here is the climax so everything up until now has been building a story that has received so far no resolution whatsoever you've had these romantic valiances between Ruth and Boaz you've seen a lot of graciousness from God and from Boaz but there's been no resolution to the main problem that Ruth and Naomi have so you have these two women

Naomi is this older widow Ruth is this younger widow and they've been traveling together back into God's country from Moab and they're looking for a home they're looking for safety and what brings them to Israel in the first place is an act of faith they both decide we're going to cast our lot with the God of Israel the God of Yahweh and so they go back to Israel looking for they know not what and today we're looking at what's officially called the redemption of Naomi and Ruth and we've probably seen if you were here last week you saw that Ruth looks at Boaz and says you are a redeemer and so she calls him to act on that fact but you don't actually see him doing it until this chapter and that's what's going on on the surface level Ruth has called Boaz to be a redeemer but under the surface and one of the themes that's playing out all along this book is this idea that behind everything good that's happening to Ruth and Naomi which is mainly from the hand of Boaz

God is also working and the writer actually puts this in really subtle ways but they're also clear so for instance whenever Ruth first meets Boaz Boaz looks at her in Ruth 2.12 and says the Lord repay you for what you have done Ruth and a full reward give you by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge so he says Ruth you've come to Israel to take refuge under God's wings and then in the last chapter we just you would have read last week Ruth looks at Boaz and says in 3.9 at least in the Hebrew your translation will read a little bit differently but Ruth looks at Boaz and says Boaz spread your wings over me because you're my redeemer so Boaz is telling Ruth God is spreading his wings over you Ruth is looking at Boaz saying you need to spread your wings over me and you know you could say which one is it is it God or is it Boaz and the answer is it's both that in this story

God is using Boaz to spread his wings over Ruth and Naomi and to protect them so when you come to chapter 4 what you see is Boaz redeeming Naomi and Ruth and yet what I want to argue this morning is yes this is an act of redemption by Boaz but behind that what it's giving us a portrait of is a God who redeems so my argument this morning is that behind a redeeming Boaz you have a redeeming God and when I say something like that I immediately feel defensive because redeem the word redemption in Christian circles can a lot of times sound cliché and trite you know God is our redeemer he's our savior he's our rescuer and it's not cliché and trite because those are cliché and trite words it's because I think we often use them and we don't ever actually stop to think about what they mean so I want to say this morning that God is our redeemer and I want to say that in a way that's not trite and not cliché by trying to say what that means and so what I want to do this morning is look at this story chapter 4 and I want to say this gives us a picture of what redemption looks like it tells us about redemption so that when we look in the gospel we understand what the gospel writers mean when they say that God has redeemed us and I want to argue that redemption in this story we learn three things about what redemption is in this story and the first one is this redemption whenever you hear the word redemption in the Bible redemption means legal security so when Ruth looks at Boaz you know at that intimate night in the barn she looks at Boaz and says

Boaz you are my redeemer she's not saying Boaz you're a great guy and she's not saying Boaz you could be a hero in this moment she's using a legal term redemption was it was not this like fluffy title it was a specific legal term that and she was making an objective legal claim about who Boaz was or could be in relation to her so redemption in the Old Testament I'm going to give you a small definition of what a redeemer is in the Old Testament in the Old Testament a redeemer was a family member or a kinsman who could be called upon to protect the family to protect the family name or the family's inheritance whenever it was threatened through calamities like poverty or death so for instance when you read Leviticus 25 God gives this command to so-called redeemers who are next of kin and what he says is one example that he gives is if a man becomes so poor that the only way that he can support himself is to sell all of his inheritance a redeemer always and forever has the right to buy from whoever bought that land and bring it back into the family and what that person is doing is you're redeeming the land that was lost for the sake of that man and for the sake of his family and in the same way if a man becomes even more poor if he becomes so poor that he sells himself into slavery just so that someone can provide for him a redeemer an ex-if kin always has the right in Israel to go to the person who has bought this man and to buy back his freedom and what you would call that is the redeemer is paying a redemption price to bring his family member home that's what redemption is it's a specific legal term and that's the principle that's at work here in the beginning of chapter 4 so Naomi and Ruth are widows without family they don't belong to anyone because Naomi's husband is deceased she belonged to

[7 : 11] Elimelech and Boaz as we begin this story is going to go to the city gate and he's going to try to redeem Naomi and Ruth and by that we mean bring them back into the family of Israel so that they will have a house to belong to because remember this may not be so cute for us today but to be a widow in the Old Testament was a hard life in fact in the Old Testament typically you'll find that there's three people that God always commands Israel to look out for the widow the orphan and the foreigner three people who are always going to have a tough time in the ancient world and he says those are the people you look out for so Boaz is going to try to redeem them and so he goes to the gates of the city which is where deals always happen and of course the conflict which this reads like a romance story the conflict is there's another man in the picture and the other man is closer of kin so he has the official right to redeem Naomi and the land and you don't even realize that land is a part of this issue until you get to chapter 4 and so Boaz goes up to to the city like we said he goes to the redeemer and he says there's a piece of land that could be redeemed do you want to redeem it and I so wish that I could have been there to see Boaz's face because

I don't know he's an honest man and he's a just man and you see that in the fact that he offers the other guy the redemption right first but there's a shrewdness here too isn't there because because of the way that he presents the offer he says there's just a great deal of land that you could redeem if you wanted to and the guy says well of course and then you know and then after the guy's agreed he says oh by the way there's this there's this widow that you'd have to you'd have to take on board she's not even from Israel she's a Moabite and you can see the guy suddenly realizing this wasn't such a good deal that I thought it was and so I think there's something sly about what Boaz is doing here but he's doing it because he loves Ruth and because he wants to redeem this family and bring them back together so when the guy they just call him the redeemer when he turns down his opportunity for the redemption Boaz redeems the land along with Naomi and Ruth and in doing that he is making a commitment to protect them to watch over them to protect Naomi as this old widow who has no way to support herself and eventually we'll see that he'll marry Ruth so protecting them in different ways but he's bringing them into his household and guaranteeing their safety and their security and I'll be honest I don't know I don't understand all the rules of redemption that are going on here and this is the one place where I was hoping you wouldn't stop me and say I'll come back and part of it is that even scholars they it's not quite clear how all of the rules are working here but one thing that's really clear is that it's evident about redemption itself and this is what I want to point out in the first place is that redemption is a public and a permanent claim about a relationship so when Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi there's no going back he is making a legal binding commitment to be their redeemer now and always so they belong to Boaz and that language can be a bit uncomfortable like he's just bought himself a wife and bought himself another lady but it's probably better to think of it in the way that we might describe marriage as we belong to one another he's making a commitment to always be there for them as their redeemer and that legally binding part of redemption really matters because it's the

difference between chapter three and chapter four you know we've already seen Boaz be a great guy and provide for these ladies but what

Naomi and Ruth get in chapter four is security they get the chance to never have to doubt again where their support is going to come from they get to know and they don't have to worry anymore that they belong to someone and someone's there to take care of them and of course that's a surface level truth that's a historical fact and of course behind that we see that God is working in their lives and he's the one that's bringing them back into the fold and guaranteeing their safety and one reason why I think it's important to point out this fact that redemption is a legal binding permanent claim is because it tells us something about the gospel when the gospel says that Jesus Christ is our redeemer and one thing it tells us is that when we are redeemed that is a permanent legally binding commitment that God has made to us so for instance in Ephesians 1:7 Paul says that in Christ we have redemption through his blood through Christ's blood for the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of his grace and whenever you know if you're raised in the church you read through that word redemption and we're not we're not

Hebrews we're not Jews and so we don't always immediately think back to the Old Testament but Paul was a Jew of what he called himself a Hebrew of Hebrews and so he's using that redemption in a very specific legal way he's saying just like Boaz redeemed Ruth and Naomi Jesus Christ has redeemed you which means he has made a legal claim on you that is binding and won't go away it can't be undone and so there's no scenario in which Jesus Christ could redeem you and then you could be unredeemed and I think that's important why I would emphasize that the legal permanence is because I think for many Christians that's one of the hardest things about the gospel to believe which is that Jesus Christ really promises to stay with us to the end because so many of our relationships in our modern world are what you might call transactional relationships where my relationship with you and your relationship with me is based on what we can do for one another and we're only committed to one another as long as we're both getting the benefits that we want from this relationship and that can be as simple as you're at work and so naturally your friends are going to be the people you know at work but oftentimes that relationship only lasts as long as you're at work and then you get a new job and you don't really hear from those people again it's a come and go relationship and even in marriages today sometimes the way that you'll hear people talk about marriage is it's useful as long as both people are getting what they want out of it and the moment they're not you can tear it apart and you can start over because the end goal was that both people be as happy as they could be and if you project that kind of a relationship onto God that's a really scary thought because

[14:21] God is perfect and he will always be the perfect lover the perfect friend and we will always not be the perfect lover and the perfect friend and so if we're thinking through this transactionally we'll always wonder when is he going to turn on me we can never feel safe in our relationship with God because we know that we're not good enough for the savior of the universe and that's why we have to meditate on this idea that redemption is a legally binding claim that God makes on us which is him saying whatever you do I have committed myself to you and to protect you forever and always to be your redeemer there was no requirement placed on Ruth and Naomi it was all it was a one directional relationship so when Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi he goes to the gates of the city he makes a public declaration that these women are his that he'll be their protector without qualification and he will pay whatever cost it takes not only to redeem them but to support them for the rest of their lives

I'll stop there but I think that's good news that redemption is a legal permanent claim the second point I want to make is about redemption is that redemption is it's a homecoming so behind redeeming Boaz you have a redeeming God who provides legal security and secondly he provides a homecoming and I think if there's one hidden gem of the book of Ruth it's this idea of homecoming and I think it would have been far more evident to a Hebrew reading this than it is to us now on the surface this is obvious what you have here is Naomi and Ruth they've been wanderers in a foreign land they come home to Israel and they need a home and so in the redemption they're given a home they're allowed to go and live with Boaz and Ruth with Boaz and until they have that even Naomi who's an Israelite she's essentially a wanderer she has no place to go but with the redemption they are legally brought back into the house of Israel the house of Yahweh but a Hebrew reading this in say 1000 BC would have said there's so much more going on here because it's not just about

Naomi and Ruth it's about what Naomi and Ruth represent and they both represent the kinds of people that you would never expect would or should have a homecoming in the house of Israel so I don't know if I don't know you may have talked about this but in Ruth chapter 1 you hear about where Naomi came from Naomi was married to a man named Elimelech and when famine struck they left the promised land to go to Moab and which sounds innocent enough but if you think about who Israel is these are people who have committed themselves to Yahweh they've committed themselves to this promised land and so when Elimelech leaves Israel he is what a Hebrew would have read in this is he is a man who is turning his back on the God of Israel he has decided to seek prosperity somewhere else whether it's away from Yahweh so he goes to Moab and there's ironies built into this one of the ironies is that Elimelech's name in Hebrew literally means my God is king but here you have a man of Israel who says my God is king but whose life reflects that not whatsoever and that idea is even more emphasized by the fact that the book of Ruth in verse 1 it says this was set during the time of the judges and the judges was probably the worst time in Israel's life the theme of judges is this was a time when there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes and so when you get to

Ruth Elimelech is the living expression of that fact here is a man who did not have a king even though his name was my God as king he did not have a king and he did what was right in his own eyes and he leaves the promised land so Naomi a Hebrew reading this would have looked at Naomi and said she is the personification of an Israel that has left itself that has gone and sought hope elsewhere and then you come to Ruth and Ruth is even worse Ruth is well all that we know about her is that she's a Moabite which to us you know it's just another country but that that would have been like fingernails on a chalkboard to someone who is from Israel because the whole story of Moab was the Moabites were people who had set themselves against God and from the beginning they're this tainted group of people so in Genesis it was Genesis 19 there's this weird story where Lot and his daughters are fleeing from

Sodom and Gomorrah and his daughters get scared that they'll never have children so they get Lot drunk one night and they lay with him and they have children one of those children's name is Moab so Moab is a child born of an incestuous relationship and later on in the Old Testament there's the story where some of the Moabite women come in to live with the Israelites and they as the Bible portrays it they seduce a lot of the Israelite men and lead them away to worship foreign gods and there's other stories where just Moab as a country sets itself against Israel and doesn't help them when they're in their time of need and you may say well we shouldn't stereotype like that but the whole point of this story is Hebrews did stereotype like that and when they would have heard into the story of Ruth walks a Moabite woman they would have immediately thought this woman is suspect that she's not from the people of God and we expect her to play a role that is dangerous and that will lead someone like

[20 : 25] Boaz astray but then what happens when you actually open the story you have Naomi who represents Israel who has gone astray and you have Ruth who represents a people who were never part of Yahweh and both of them find themselves in the beginning of the story walking into Israel looking for God putting their faith in the God of Israel and hoping that God the God of Israel will be their provider and what does Boaz do as the righteous man acting on behalf of Yahweh he redeems them and what this is doing is through Boaz's redemption God sends a message to his people about the kind of God that he is that he's not the kind of God that said that you know puts a chain link fence around Israel and says these are my people and these are the only people that I have instead what he does is he says anyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved whether you're a Moabite or whether you're one of these people who were my people and who walked away from me even if you come back you can be redeemed and this of course foreshadows one of the great surprises of the gospel message which is that the gospel is not just for

Israel it's for the Gentiles too and so all throughout the Old Testament you have these moments where God invites someone who's not a part of the clan of Israel into the house to show that it can be done so that when Jesus comes and he flings wide open the door you can look back and you say God was preparing us for this all along so what does this passage show us about God as a redeemer it's simply that God calls all kinds of people to himself and I think one reason that's important for us to hear is because we can often be the people who want to limit God's grace I assume especially in a church plant one thing that's exciting is you probably more than an established church are looking out into your community and saying who could we bring in here

whether that's people who are not connected to a church people who don't believe in the gospel at all and I find when I do that sometimes I begin to categorize people and say this person is nice I could picture them as Christians and then your other neighbor who's rude who you don't have anything in common with and you say that's not the person that I can imagine being in our church and when we do that we are limiting the gospel more than God does because one of the messages over and over again throughout the Old and the New Testament is this is a hope that's open to anyone who would come in and seek the name of the Lord Naomi and Ruth had no money they had nothing except for the fact that they put their hope in this God of hoping that he could be their redeemer and he was so I want to get to my final point so what we learn about redemption here redemption is this legally binding claim that gives us surety about the redemption that we have it's a homecoming and it brings in all kinds of people into the kingdom of God and lastly and briefly redemption always involves a payment and you see this and this is another question that I don't know the answer to it's clear here that Boaz gives a payment it's not clear who he gives it to or even what the payment is but the way the story is worded you can tell it's meant to be understood that it was he paid a price to bring these women into his household and one way you know that is because another man had a chance to and he turned it down he said these women are not worth it it's too costly to redeem these people and Boaz does it and it's just one of the facts of redemption is that redemption always involves a cost to the redeemer so that the redemption can happen Boaz is willing to pay that cost and fulfill his responsibility and you can say in one way this it's a sign of how much he loves Ruth however much he's willing to pay for her redemption so it's this classic love story between you know where a hero is willing to go to great lengths to save the damsel in distress and one of the things of course that this is preparing us for is the idea that God is willing in order to redeem his people to pay a price to redeem them and it's the kind of idea that you needed to have settled into the Old Testament so that when it happens in the New Testament you have some framework for understanding what's going on here because in the New Testament God comes and he pays a cost to redeem his people and of course that cost is Jesus Christ going to the cross

Colossians 1:4 says that in Jesus Christ we have redemption the forgiveness of sins Christ goes to the cross and it's literally an act of redemption where he goes and he pays the cost that it takes to bring his people home to himself it's just like in the Old Testament it's that legal commitment that he makes and it's costly and over and over again the New Testament tries to emphasize the fact that it was costly and it's worth thinking about why would the New Testament emphasize the costliness of the gospel to us because you could say well because this is a transactional relationship so God wants you to know what he's done for you so that you can know what your expectations are to stay in a relationship he's done his part he's died for you what are you going to do but that's not the way that redemption is treated here in the book of Ruth when Ruth and Naomi are redeemed you don't get the sense that

[26 : 51] Boaz looks at them and says I guess you guys owe me now no what it is the response of these people who have been redeemed is absolute joy it's only rejoicing because there's nothing they could do to pay back Boaz for what he's done and and when you read the New Testament over and over again there's this emphasis on the cost to Jesus Christ for redeeming us but it's not in order to say sometimes it's to be exemplary to say we should reflect this kind of love to our neighbors but it's primarily always done in a sense of wonder by saying imagine what this means about what God thinks about you if he's willing to go to these kinds of lengths to redeem you and these are verses that we all know like John 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave his only son there's no command at the end of that sentence except he calls the people to believe but all he's doing is trying to instill a sense of wonder about what redemption is and how precious we must be to him if he's willing to redeem us like that

Romans 8:32 Paul says he who did not spare his own son talking about God but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him give us all things so Paul's trying to say Christians should need to learn to be logical and part of our logic is saying if you have a God who's given you his son don't ever accuse him of being stingy in the moment because he's proven to you that he will give you everything you need to support you today for all the needs you have today and the proof of that is the redemption price the redemption price was so high that any God who would ever be willing to pay that must treasure you give you give me give me two minutes

I'll close with this what do we mean when we call Jesus our redeemer you have this legal security which teaches us that there's a permanence to redemption you have a homecoming which speaks of the breadth of redemption and you have a payment which speaks of the depth of redemption and that's our God and all we have to do today is to dwell on that and to meditate on that and to let that change us and to make us rejoice and the one thing I didn't mention which is worth noting because what right do I have to tie this story into the gospel story and one of the ways that it ties in naturally is the way the book of Ruth ends is by giving this genealogy God gave Ruth this foreign Moabite woman the chance to be David's ancestor and when you open the book of Matthew there she is again in the ancestry of Jesus Christ and for a Jew hearing the gospel for the first time and seeing that genealogy it's this message that says what Jesus Christ has come to do is going to envelop so many people with a love that is so deep and so wide that you have to use all the categories all the Old

Testament categories you have to understand what this could mean so that's the end of Ruth and I'm thankful for it and I'll pray for us Heavenly Father we praise you for your goodness we ask for forgiveness when we talk unthinkingly about all the ways that you've given us to describe your goodness to us and we praise you this morning that you're our redeemer and that there's real truth behind that statement and truth that gives us hope to live this day and to live this week and we ask that you would help us to live in light of that hope in your son's name we pray amen amen amen Thank you.