

Why We Need A Redeemer (Ruth 3)

Introduction

In our country, we have enough to eat. We have enough to wear. We have shelter. We have transportation. We have health care. We're surrounded with many provisions for our physical and material needs. And it's possible for us to be deceived. It's possible for people to live healthy lives, in comfortable homes, with labor saving devices, and conclude that they must have everything they need. Our government at least seems to think that if they provide for people's material needs, then that's all there is.

But what about people's deeper needs? What about a need for a joy that can never be taken away? What about the need for a purpose in life? What about the need for forgiveness? What about the need for a clear conscience? What about the need for transformed relationships with spouses and their children, so that people's marriages and homes don't break up? What about the need for everlasting life and to know our God and maker? If these needs are not met, then people are truly miserable. The words of Christ to the church at Laodicea could apply to so many today: "You say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). And in a similar way, if the book of Ruth had ended in chapter 2, it would be a tragedy. It would show us two women provided for materially, but still without a future, a purpose, or a destiny.

Review

Back in chapter 2, we saw how Boaz had been very, very generous to this young widow named Ruth. She's in the field working hard gleaning for her mother-in-law, picking up the leftovers. But Boaz knows what's going on. He tells his men, "Be intentionally careless—very careless. Drop a lot." At the end of one day, Ruth had a remarkable amount of grain, about five gallons. That's about all that a strong young woman could carry back home. And when Ruth returned, there's not only plenty to eat but plenty to talk about. Her mother-in-law was astonished at her success. She's pleased and surprised. She says, "Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed." A great change had taken place that day. They had all they needed to eat, and could sell the rest. Their physical needs were provided for. But their *deepest* needs were still unmet. What were their deepest needs?

To understand their situation, you need to go back 3,000 years and understand a couple things about the people and the culture of that day. In fact, if you can understand the three things I'll explain today, you can understand what's going on in the book of Ruth. These things are different from our society. First, there was the importance of a permanent, enduring name.

1. Our need for a permanent name

Naomi is a widow. Her husband has died, and her two sons have died. She is a woman who has no husband, no children, and no grandchildren. Now, to us, that's a tragedy. We feel sorry for her. But to the people of that day, this was one of the worst things that could have ever happened to you. It's not just that you were left alone with nobody to take care of you. It's much more serious than that. Your family *name* is about to be permanently blotted out from among the people of God. And so in the Old Testament law, extraordinary measures were taken to keep a family's name alive. Listen to this passage from Deut 25, which I also put in your notes, "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, *that his name may not be blotted out of Israel*" (Deut 25:5-6).

That's the reason. If a man died without children, it was the duty of the man's brother to marry the widow and to give her children. And the first son was to be named after the dead man to keep his name alive in Israel. Otherwise, your name was permanently forgotten, erased, blotted out of the people of God.

This is one of the reasons for the frequent mention in the OT of the blessing of children. Sometimes I think we need to be careful reading these verses in our day. There are some verses that suggest that having no children was about the worst disaster that could happen to you. But it's different for them, you see. Understand that in that society, it was of supreme importance to have a name to endure in Israel.

So, this is Naomi's situation. There is no son, no heir, no descendant. Their name is about to be blotted out permanently. This is the first problem. The second is the land.

2. Our need for a permanent home

The family land was also tremendously important for people in Israel. Years earlier, when they first entered Canaan, God himself had distributed to each family a plot of land. It was their permanent stake in the Promised Land. It was their inheritance, and the inheritance of their family forever, a gift from the Lord. Remember how Joshua distributed the land out to all the tribes, and each family received their lot from the Lord? That land meant that you had a place among God's people, and that you and your family to come were sharing in the blessings of God's covenant. And that land therefore was never to be sold. Lev 25:23, "The land must not be sold permanently."

That is why later on, for example, when the wicked king Ahab comes to Naboth and makes a very fair and reasonable commercial offer that Naboth should sell the king his land, Naboth is filled with horror. He says, "The

LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (1 Ki 21:3). To lose your land was to lose your heritage and place among God's people. It was, you see, a symbol heaven itself. Psalm 37, "Evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land." But here was a family that had forfeited their land, and who was about to lose it forever. No one would inherit the land.

So do you understand a little of their situation. Naomi and Ruth had work. They had enough to eat. Boaz had been very generous at a material level. But they had no permanent name and no permanent place among the people of God. They're about to be forgotten and wiped off the map. And if the book of Ruth ended here, it would be a tragedy. It would show two women provided for materially, but their deepest needs unmet. If you'd been living in that time, you'd not only have felt sorry for Naomi and Ruth, but you would've sensed the great tragedy that still hanging them: *no name and no land*. They were in desperate situation. They needed an impossibility. They needed life from the dead. They needed someone who could continue the family name. And they needed someone who could restore the family land. And this brings us to our third point...

3. God's provision for a personal redeemer

Where I started reading in 2:20, Naomi starts to get excited, as if to say, "I believe something impossible *is* going to happen. I believe that there's going to be life from the dead. I believe that our dead husbands are going to have sons. I believe there's someone who's going to inherit their property."

Look at the last part of Ruth 2:20. Naomi is speaking of Boaz, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our *close relatives*" (Ruth 2:20). If you have the ESV, it says "redeemer." If you have the NIV, it says, "This man is one of our kinsman-redeemers." For reasons I'll explain in a moment, your next-of-kin was called in Hebrew literally your "redeemer." *Ga'al* is the verb to redeem. *Go'el* is the redeeming one, the redeemer. That's the word used here in verse 20 and elsewhere in the book. And it's not just a name. God's law appointed your next of kin to be your redeemer and to do several things for you if necessary. Do you know what being a redeemer involved involved?

The Restorer of Land

First, if someone in Israel had to sell his family property because he was poor, it was the responsibility of the redeemer—of the next of kin—to buy it back and give it to him—to buy back your land for you! What a tremendous responsibility! It would be nice to think that you had a relative like that: that if you needed money and were in foreclosure, or you had to sell your house, that you had a close relative who would come and buy it back and give it to you. That was the responsibility of the redeemer. He was the restorer of lost land.

Leviticus 25, "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession you shall grant [the right of] redemption of the land. If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold" (Lev 25:25-27). The redeemer was the one who would restore your land. And that's not all. That's just the first thing. The second is this.

The Restorer of Freedom

If need be, the redeemer would buy *you* out of slavery and restore your freedom. If you were forced to sell yourself into slavery because you were so poor, the redeemer was able to buy you out of slavery and give you your freedom. A little later in Leviticus 25 it says, "Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brothers may redeem him; or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; or anyone who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him" (Lev 25:47-49). And that's not all. The redeemer was the restorer of justice.

The Restorer of Justice

If a man had been murdered in Israel, the redeemer was the one responsible to make sure that justice was done. But there was one more important responsibility of a redeemer, which bears on this story. The redeemer was responsible was to provide an heir.

The Restorer of Life and Name

We read it earlier from Deuteronomy 25. If a man died childless, and his name was about to be blotted out from Israel, the redeemer could carry on his name. Although the man was dead, there could be life from the dead. It was the redeemer's responsibility, if a man died, to marry the widow and give the widow children for the dead man. The firstborn son would bear the name of the man who had died. God had appointed the redeemer to bring life from the dead and to give hope to the hopeless.

And that's what's going on in this chapter. This is why Naomi is so excited at the end of chapter 2. This is why Ruth goes to him at night and asks him in this symbolic way, 3:9, "Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a [redeemer, same word]" (Ruth 3:9).

So, it's a little awkward to have to go up to someone and ask him to do all this for you. But think, Ruth could hardly walk up to Boaz in the middle of the field, drop down on one knee, and say, "Marry me!" She could hardly put a classified ad in the Bethlehem Observer saying, "Widowed Moabitess seeks hardworking man of character for long walks in the barley fields and quiet evenings by the fire. Must like children." Naomi tells her what she needs to do.

She needs to go see him privately at night and ask him to fulfill this responsibility of a redeemer. She needed a permanent place, and a permanent name among the people of God. That's why she needed a redeemer.

And you see, these are exactly our needs too, although we express them in different ways. You see, we're also in need a permanent place forever among the people of God. We also are in grave danger of having our name blotted out forever from the book of life. Like Naomi, we've gone astray, and now our name is about to be blotted out. We have no claim in the kingdom of God. We need life from the dead. Like Naomi, our situation seems hopeless. Do you know what we need? We need a Redeemer. We need someone to purchase for us an everlasting inheritance and give to us an everlasting name.

And now you see why God came up with this role of a *redeemer* in Israel. God created that institution, ultimately, to teach us about Jesus. Jesus has a people to whom he is elder brother and next of kin. As it says, he is the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29). He's the one whom God's appointed to help us. He's able to give us life from the dead. He's able to purchase our liberty though we had sold ourselves as slaves. He's able to take our debts upon himself and pay what we owe. He's able to satisfy justice fully. He's able to buy back our inheritance that we forfeited. He's the one who's able to provide for us what we cannot provide. He can give us an everlasting name in an everlasting kingdom. This is what's behind all those references in the NT, people. Paul says, "In Him we have redemption" (Eph 1:7). This is what's behind the name "Redeemer Church."

This book of Ruth doesn't just illustrate some interesting features of OT law. The focus of this book, and the focus of our need, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who has come to bring us true and eternal redemption. He's the one who even now transforms our daily lives. He makes all the difference. He redeems us, giving us a name, and life, and an inheritance that we can never lose. He comes to people who are lost, and lonely, and far away, and puts his arms around them. He says, I will care for you. I will help you. I am your appointed redeemer.

And this is why our great Redeemer was born a thousand years later in Bethlehem. I'll explain the connection next week. But Jesus was born in Bethlehem because this man Boaz fulfilled his calling as a redeemer, and came to the rescue of his needy people. God has intended for you to see in Boaz the forerunner of your great redeemer.

This is why Christ was born in Bethlehem. Do you need any more encouragement to come? God has appointed him to be your redeemer. If you need life, if you need an eternal inheritance among God's people, if you need justice to be served, if you need to be delivered from your slavery, if you need a name that will not be permanently blotted out and forgotten, then you need Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Let me conclude now by saying just a few word about living in the light of this redemption. I said that God had created the office of a redeemer ultimately to teach us about Jesus. But it was also so that God's people might take part in his work.

The people were told time and time again that God was their redeemer. Exodus 6, God had said to his people in Egypt, right from the beginning, "I will redeem you" (Exod 6:6). Psalm 130, God will redeem Israel from all her sin and sorrow (Ps 130:8). God is the redeemer. It is *God* who stands by the oppressed. It is He who shows mercy to the needy. It is he who frees the slaves. It is he who brings justice to bear. It is He who comes to give us a new future and a new hope.

And God says to his people, "Because I have been your redeemer, you are to be redeemers—not in the spiritual sense but as you see in very practical and real ways. Because I bring hope, you bring hope. Because I care for the widow, you must care for the widow. Because I set the slaves free, you must set the slaves free. Because I pay all your debts, you pay each others' debts. Because I give people a future, you give people a future. Because I redeem, you must redeem." Their activity was to be a picture of his, a pattern of his.

You see the application. The obligation for God's people has not gone away. Rather, for us the responsibility is even greater, living in the light of the greater redeemer of Bethlehem. Have we not been called to follow the redeemer and do his deeds? Yes, *we* are to care for those who have need. *We* are to help the helpless, and so forth. Why? Because this is what Jesus did for us. This is what he does now. And we are called to live in the light of this redemption. Boaz was living in the light of redemption. That's why Ruth and Naomi were helped. Boaz took it seriously. "I have a redeemer, so I must live as a redeemer," and he helped them.

Do we have a redeemer? Then we must live as people who have been redeemed, giving ourselves to others spiritually, emotionally, economically, in every way we can. Jesus said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:12-13). So today, let us thank God that there is a redeemer to help us. And let us in our own place and our own way live in a redemptive way.

And if you're not a Christian, this book tells you that there is hope today. God has appointed someone who can help us, a redeemer, to meet our deepest needs. Because of him, friends, there is hope today. There is hope for the spiritually dead, for people who have no life in their souls. There's hope for the disinherited, for those who have no permanent place among the people of God, who have no

plot in Canaan, no piece of heavenly ground that they can call their own. There is hope for them. There is hope for those who have deep, urgent needs that no human power can meet, that they can be helped. There's hope of forgiveness and peace, and purpose and joy, and strength. And that hope is the same for us as it was for Naomi and Ruth. Their hope was in a person. And when Naomi heard of this person, she was glad and she said, "There is hope. God has not stopped showing his kindness." And there is hope for you too, friends. That hope is in a person, a redeemer, whose name is Jesus.