

Ruth 4 “The Redeemer”
Psalm 127
Luke 1:57-80

December 20, 2015

Chapter 1 ended with Ruth's profession of faith.
Chapter 2 ended with Naomi's blessing of Boaz.
Chapter 3 ended with Boaz's blessing of Ruth.

Now chapter 4 ends in a crescendo of blessing,
as the elders and all the people bless Boaz and Ruth -
and the women bless the LORD who provided a redeemer for Naomi!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 127 -
a Psalm which focuses on the “house” the “city” “children” and the “gates” of the city,
and which reminds us that unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.

Sing Psalm 127
Read Luke 1:57-80

The book of Ruth is all about redemption.
And Zechariah's song draws on this theme in its opening words,
“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.”

The idea of redemption is that you pay a price in order to “redeem” something.
It's not just a “purchase” of some brand new object.
The idea of redemption always includes recovering something.
There is something lost – something in peril –
that makes *redemption* necessary.

The word is often used in the OT to speak of how God “redeemed” Israel
from Egypt or from Exile.

And now Zechariah says that God has visited his people once again
and redeemed them.

Why does he say this?
Because he sees a baby in his wife's arms.
And, what is more, he knows that the virgin Mary is going to give birth soon!
(in the house of his servant David).

The birth of the redeemer is *itself* an act of redemption.
Zechariah sees this in the birth of John,

just like the women of Bethlehem saw this in the birth of Obed!

We heard at the end of Ruth 3, that Naomi had said that Boaz would act immediately -
and she was right.

Because even while Ruth is talking to her mother-in-law,
Boaz is already at the city gate, ready and willing to redeem her.

1. Will the Real Redeemer Please Stand Up? (v1-6)

a. Boaz and Mr. So-and-So before the Elders (v1-2)

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.

This is the way that business was conducted in the ancient world:
you go to the city gate and wait.

The gate of the city is where business is conducted.

There are practical reasons for this.

Everyone lives in the city.

And everyone has to go in and out of the gates in order to do work.

And you need to have *one* place for business to be transacted,

because in a day when every contract is oral,

you need multiple witnesses to confirm and attest what is done.

So Boaz sits down in the city gate –
and soon the redeemer arrives!

Now when Boaz says, "Turn aside, friend" -
the word translated "friend" could better be translated, "Mr. So-and-So."

The phrase is deliberately chosen in order to avoid naming him!

Think about the importance of names in this book.

Everyone else in the book is *named* – connected –

everyone else has a place (perhaps a fragile and delicate place),

but everyone else *belongs* in a place in the story.

Indeed, Boaz tells us that Mr. So-and-So is even *better* connected than Boaz is.

He is a closer relative than Boaz.

But what relation is he?

We don't know!

Because we do not know his name!

All he is called in this passage is "the Redeemer" - the "go'el" in Hebrew.

As the *go'el* he is the one who has the first right of redemption.

And so Boaz sits down with the redeemer and ten elders of the city.

b. Negotiating Redemption: The Mighty Man of Valor Proves His Worth (v3-6)

3 Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you[a] will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you."

In the Hebrew it says that Naomi *had sold* the parcel of land.

Probably what this means is that Elimelech had mortgaged the land before he left. Someone else (a third party) has doubtless been using the land for the last decade.

Naomi has returned – but she is not able to pay off the mortgage,
and she has no son – and not even a daughter,
so she has no way to make use of the land.

There is no *heir* to continue possession of the land.

Therefore, according to the inheritance law of Numbers 27,
the land passes to Elimelech's brothers, or his father's brothers,
or his closest relative – whoever that may be.

The problem is that the land is in the hand of a stranger.

Mr. So-and-So is the the closest relative.

If he will redeem the land, and pay off the mortgage,
then the land is his!

All he has to do is provide for the elderly widow, Naomi –
a small price to pay to add a valuable piece of land to his inheritance!

Naomi is old – she has no heirs –
so Mr. So-and-So replies quickly:

And he said, "I will redeem it." 5 Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth[b] the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."

Okay, this requires a little explanation!

Didn't Mr. So-and-So already *know* about Ruth?

Didn't Boaz say to Ruth

that "all my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of valor"? (3:11)

Of course Mr. So-and-So knew all about Ruth!

But Ruth is a Moabite!

She is a foreigner.

She is an outsider.
And, quite frankly, she is a *woman*.

When Boaz came to the city gate and said, “Do you want to redeem the land?”
Mr. So-and-So thought
that Boaz was suggesting that we just cut Ruth out of the picture!

It would have been so easy!
Two powerful Jewish men.
A handful of their friends – fellow-elders of Bethlehem.

And on the other side a poor, Moabite widow.
An outsider.
A foreigner.
A woman.
A widow.
With no one to protect her.

We can just make our arrangements.
If you and I agree, Boaz, then we can settle this all very friendly-like!

Rightly is he called a “So-and-So”!

But now we discover why Boaz was called “a mighty man of valor.”
We still don't know what feats of strength he accomplished on the battlefield!
But here in the city gate, he reveals his wisdom, his justice, and his compassion
for the weak and the oppressed!

Oh, by the way,
5 Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth[b] the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.”

Boaz is making a complicated legal argument!
The law of Levirate marriage
only said that a *brother* was required to take his deceased brother's widow.
Nowhere does the Law of Moses say that the law of redemption
requires a more distantly related redeemer to marry the widow!
But Boaz is saying that redeeming the land and levirate marriage go together
(which makes sense, given the relation between Land and Seed).

Andrew Deliyannides explains this beautifully:

In one stroke Boaz defends the alien, the widow, the poor, the afflicted—
all embodied in Ruth...
What Boaz does here is truly remarkable.
Nowhere in the law of the covenant is the levirate duty

explicitly conjoined to the right of redemption,
but Boaz does precisely that...
Boaz understands the spirit of the law.
The same principles that safeguard the integrity of land and seed within the clan
in the laws of redemption are also enforced in the levirate laws.
That is, the responsibility of redemption *encompasses* the levirate duty...
His redemption must take the form of a marriage,
for at stake is nothing less than the clan, its inheritance, and its future glory.” (p18)

And in that case, Mr. So-and-So's response suggests that he feared that having a child with Ruth
would result in impairing his own inheritance:

*6 Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take
my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.”*

After all, if Mr. So-and-So redeems the land,
marries Ruth, and has a son,
then that son will inherit Naomi's land – and so all that Mr. So-and-So
invests in that property, will diminish his own inheritance.

Of course, Mr. So-and-So has another option!
He could claim the right of redemption of the land,
and reject the duty of levirate marriage!
After all, Deuteronomy 25 makes it clear
that even a brother could refuse to marry the widow.
And Mr. So-and-So is *not* a brother, and so therefore he has no *necessary* obligation.

So why doesn't Mr. So-and-So choose that option?
Because Boaz has boxed him in!
If Mr. So-and-So redeems the land – but does *not* marry Ruth,
then Boaz has *clearly* implied that *he* will marry Ruth.

And if Boaz and Ruth have a son –
then *that son* will inherit the land that Mr. So-and-So would redeem!

Again, Andrew Deliyannides says it well:

“Boaz is schooling [Mr. So-and-So] in the art of redemption.
He is saying to him,
“If you will redeem, then *redeem!*
You say you want to redeem, but let me show you what it means to redeem.”
Redemption is not just about land.
It is not just about property.
It is about the integrity of the clan and family,
the maintenance of familial bonds,
the laying hold of the promise,
the perpetuation of God's covenant blessing,

the preservation of fellowship with Yahweh,
the protection of the poor, love for the lost, the alien, the stranger,
the widow, the fatherless.

Redemption means all this and more.

It is the ultimate expression of godliness, for God is our *goel*.

Redemption is not a right but a responsibility—
but even more, it is an act of faith.

As a faithful man of Israel, a true believer,
Boaz hoped that his family “would continue to live on their land
until the coming of the Messiah.

Then they would share with Him in the glory that was promised...

“It was to be a guarantee of his share in the coming glory of the Christ” (AD 10.19, quoting DeGraaf 58).

Redemption is costly.

And it will cost Boaz just as much as it would cost Mr. So-and-So.

Many commentators have assumed that Boaz is “better off” and can afford this.

But we don't know that!

After all, the *point* of the text is that Boaz is willing to count the cost – and pay the price.
Mr. So-and-So is not.

Why is Boaz so willing to pay this price?

Why redeem a foreign widow?

Well, perhaps he remembered his own family history!

We are told in Matthew 1, that Salmon was the father of Boaz, by Rahab.

Given the fact that Matthew only allows five generations to get from Moses to David
(a period of at least 250 years),

I'm inclined to suggest that there may be a couple generations missing here!

But only a couple!

Whether she was his mother, or his great-grandmother,

Rahab's descendants would have remembered well

how a Canaanite prostitute put her trust in the God of Israel,
and sheltered the spies when they came to Jericho.

If a Canaanite prostitute could become part of the people of God by faith,
then surely a Moabite “woman of valor” could as well!

2. Redemption Accomplished and Applied (v7-12)

a. The Custom of the Sandal (v7-8)

7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal.

The sandal ritual is also attested in Deuteronomy 25:7-10,

the passage that talks about Levirate marriage!

Deuteronomy 25 says that if a man will not marry his deceased brother's widow,
then the elders of the city shall speak to him,
and if he refuses to marry her, then the widow herself
is to pull his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face!

There is no indication in Ruth 4, that anyone spat in Mr. So-and-So's face!
But there is at least a hint of shame reflected here.
Mr. So-and-So is acknowledging that he is less of a man than Boaz.

Five hundred years later (in the time of Jeremiah, as we'll see tonight)
these contracts will be written down.

But in the days of the judges, it was sufficient for Boaz simply to keep Mr. So-and-So's sandal,
and have sufficient witnesses from among the elders of the city.

And so Boaz declares to the elders and all the people
that he has accomplished the redemption of Naomi and Ruth.

b. The Witnesses of Redemption (v9-10)

9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. 10 Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."

It's worth noting that when Boaz says that "he has bought" the land of Elimelech,
he has only acquired the title of "goel" – redeemer.
He now has the *right* to redeem.
He will still need to enter into negotiations with whoever holds the land.

You can see clearly here how Boaz thinks of the connection between land and seed.
For Boaz, the act of redemption *must* include the act of marriage -
in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers.

He has done all of this for the sake of the name of Elimelech and his sons.

Of course, look down to the end of the chapter:
whose name is in the genealogy?

Where is Elimelech?

The irony of the story of Ruth
is that Mr. So-and-So refuses to redeem Ruth,
in order to preserve his inheritance -
and yet Mr. So-and-So is forgotten *entirely* -

to the point that we do not even remember his name!
But Boaz redeems Ruth so that he may preserve the name of Elimelech -
and maintain *his* inheritance -
with the result that the name of *Boaz* is remembered,
and Boaz winds up in the genealogy of David, and thus of Christ!

Boaz is a mighty man of valor!
And he demonstrates this through his self-denying sacrifice.
The one who humbles himself is exalted!

And so, as Andrew Deliyannides puts it:

“All the voices of Bethlehem are raised in acclamation of Boaz and his new bride.

All but one.

Mr. So-and-so slinks away behind the crowd,

looking for the back alley that will bear him away unnoticed into the comfort of obscurity.

We understand now why our storyteller protected his identity,

for we remember from Deuteronomy 25 the shame of the one who refuses to do his duty
toward his brother’s widow,
the public shame at the gates of the city,
the shame of Onan who spilled his seed on the ground
for the sake of his own inheritance,
the shame of a failed redeemer.

Hobbling across the rough stone pavement, he stubs the big toe of his shoeless foot.

For his name shall be called in Israel,

“The house of him who had his sandal removed.” (p20)

But the people and the elders declare their approbation of what Boaz has done:

c. The Blessing of the Witnesses: Rachel and Leah – and Tamar! (v11-12)

11 Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, 12 and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

This is a remarkable blessing!

May this Moabite woman be like the great mothers of Israel!

Rachel and Leah – the two wives of Jacob.

Leah was the mother of Judah.

And Rachel was buried outside Bethlehem.

But then they also say, “May your house be like the house of Perez,

whom Tamar bore to Judah,

because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

Tamar was the most famous case of Levirate marriage in the OT.

In other words, the opening and the closing of this blessing

is all about Ruth having children and building up the house of Boaz.

But then, in the middle, is a line about Boaz himself:

“May you act worthily” - and yes, this is our word “*chayil*” again.

Boaz is a *gibbor chayil* – a mighty man of valor.

Ruth is an *eshet chayil* – a woman of valor.

And now the people at the gate declare their wish:

that Boaz would “act valiantly” in Ephrathah,

and that his name would be mentioned in Bethlehem.

Boaz has declared that his purpose in all of this

was to build up the house and the name of Elimelech.

And all the people respond by declaring *their purpose*

that the name of Boaz would be great in Bethlehem.

And from the conclusion in verses 13-22, we know that this blessing was from the LORD!

3. A Redeemer Is Born in Bethlehem (v13-17)

a. The Women and Naomi (v13-15)

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi,

Only twice in the book of Ruth do we hear that the LORD did something.

In 1:6, Naomi heard that the LORD has visited his people, and had given them bread.

And thus the crisis of famine had been resolved by the sovereign grace of God.

But Ruth had been barren for ten years in Moab.

Now in 4:13, the LORD gave to Ruth conception, and she bore a son.

The crisis of famine had ended in 1:6.

Now the crisis of barrenness has ended.

The LORD had restored fruitfulness to the Land.

And now the LORD restores fruitfulness to the woman -

so that she might bear a son.

Only God can save!

And that is what the women declare to Naomi:

1) Obed the Redeemer (v14b-15a)

“Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!”

This is a fascinating way of saying it!

The women plainly view *Obed* – the baby – as the redeemer!

They are not talking about the legal process of redemption.

They are talking about the very practical reality of Naomi – the widow.

Naomi now has a future!

The bitter old woman who returned from Moab has been restored to pleasantness.

15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age,

This little boy has restored life to Naomi.

The idea in the OT is that the *seed* – children – is what gives you a future.

Without children, you have no future.

And that is what makes the end of verse 15 so fascinating:

2) Ruth: The Daughter-in-Law Who Is More than Seven Sons (v15b)

for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

Because everyone *knew* that this little boy has no biological connection to Naomi!

His mother, Ruth, is a Moabite.

His father, Boaz, is distantly connected to Naomi's dead husband, Elimelech.

From a biological standpoint, Naomi has no seed.

But through Ruth, the Moabite, Naomi has a son.

Because Ruth – your daughter-in-law who loves, who is more to you than seven sons,
has given birth to him!

Truly, all the women of Bethlehem recognize that Ruth is an *eshet chayil* -
a woman of valor.

She is everything that Proverbs 31 says a woman should be!

She has loved Naomi not only in word, but in deed.

You may have lost two sons in Moab -

but you have gained something far better!

b. Naomi and Obed: “A Son Has Been Born to Naomi” (v16-17)

16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. 17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.”

In verse 16 we see the reversal of chapter 1, verse 21,

“I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.”

Now Naomi's lap is full.

God has restored all that he had taken away.

And

They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Obed means “servant.”

How is Obed a servant?
He is a servant to his grandmother!

Obed is a redeemer to Naomi.
After all, if Obed was never born,
 then Naomi would still have no future.
As Naomi's restorer of life – as her nourisher of old age –
 Obed is by birth the servant of Naomi.

But I want to bring you back to Naomi and Ruth and little Obed.
Because where verse 17 leaves them
 is in a happy place -
 but still in a “little place.”

Yes, *we know* that Obed will become the grandfather of King David.
But all *they knew* was this little baby in Naomi's lap!

They knew that life was precarious.
 They had seen it fall apart once before!
 There was joy and gladness at God's kind provision for them *this year*.
 But a few years later, they were mourning the death of their beloved redeemer, Boaz.

If you think about it,
 in all the “little stories” of history we encounter the same themes:

Widows left alone.
Sons dying out, leaving no name.
Refugees fleeing famine and war – seeking bread.

And then – every so often we hear of “happy endings” -
 the boy gets the girl – and they live 'happily ever after' –
 until one of them dies!

This is why the Book of Ruth concludes with a genealogy:

18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, 19 Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, 20 Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, 21 Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, 22 Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

This genealogy is designed to tell us that the *point* of the story
 is that *this* is how you get King David!

And of course, on this side of the cross, we see beyond David
 to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in Christ Jesus, the biblical genealogies all come to an end.

Why?

Because Jesus resolves the crisis of Land and Seed.

The whole of the OT was crying out for a Son – the Seed of the Woman –
who would finally succeed where Adam and Israel and David all failed!

If you think about it, Boaz is the redeemer who redeems the Land.

He secures for Naomi and Ruth the blessings of security, provision, and rest.

And Obed serves as a redeemer simply by being born,

by being the *Seed* who establishes a future for Naomi.

And Jesus is for us both as Obed *and* Boaz.

Jesus *is* the true Obed – the Seed of Abraham,
whose very birth brings redemption to his people.

And likewise, Jesus is the true Boaz:

in his resurrection from the dead, and ascension to the right hand of the Father,
Jesus gives us a *place* where we *belong*.

And this is why there are no more genealogies after Jesus.

Jesus is the one who says,

“Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

He is the one who blesses us with every blessing in the heavenly places!

As we go about our “little stories” this Christmas,

remember the Redeemer who was born in Bethlehem;

remember the Redeemer who gives rest to his people;

“For to us a child is born – to us a Son is given.”