

Marriage, Children, and Jesus

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Take your Bibles and you might want to go to the table of contents and make sure you know how to find the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth. If you'll just kind of start in Genesis and go to the right, when you get to Judges, you're right before the book of Ruth. We're going to be in Ruth 4. I'll read the text in just a moment. We're going to look at some truths about marriage, about children, and about Jesus.

First of all, let's do some background narrative on where the text is at this point. Elimelech has left Israel, Bethlehem in specific. He has taken his wife, Naomi, and his two sons to Moab. There has been a famine in the land and he's searching for sustenance and for food. Probably that was sin. He should have stayed in God's country, in God's land, in God's Promised Land, Israel, and trusted God to provide. But he journeys in Moab with his wife and his two sons. While in Moab, Elimelech dies and then ten years later both sons die and Naomi finds herself alone.

Naomi then looks at her two widowed daughters-in-law and says, "You have no life with me and no future with me, I'm destitute. I have nothing." Because to a Jewish woman to not raise up a male heir to take on the family name, she'd lost really just about all of her purpose. So she tells these Moabite daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, find some young men, be married and start their families. Orpah reluctantly agrees and returns to Moab. Ruth, however, is emphatic that she's going to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and she gave this famous statement to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go and where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God and where you die, that's where I'm going to die and may the Lord punish me if I allow anything to separate us."

Naomi, convinced that Ruth is going to stay with her and there is no talking her out of it, journeys back into Bethlehem destitute and downcast. No husband. No male sons to carry on the family name. And, again, this was about the most disheartening thing that could happen to a Jewish woman. To a Jew, to have lost your family's representation in the covenant nation of Israel was like being cut off from God. Nothing in Naomi's mind could be worse but God in his grace had a provision. The provision is what is called the kinsman redeemer. It's revealed in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her

to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." So if a woman's husband dies and she has no male sons, then the nearest male relative was to take her as a wife and conceive a male child who would take the name of her deceased husband so that his name would not be blotted out from Israel.

So here comes Naomi with Ruth, with no male in their families. Destitute and disheartened, they make it back to Bethlehem but there is a near relative in Bethlehem, his name is Boaz and Boaz, being a near relative, is under the law legally qualified and required to take Ruth as his wife and bear a son and that son will take the name of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech, and re-establish Elimelech's land and his name in the covenant family of Israel. But there's something a little different here, Boaz, as often happened, didn't just reluctantly take on a wife and the responsibilities and bear a male son for the deceased man's name, he genuinely loved Ruth and so love got at him even more than the law got at him.

Now, this is where we pick up in Ruth 4:13.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. 15 May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. 17 The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Now, three words here. First of all, a word about marriage and that is that marriage involves the church family and the community at large. It always has been that way, it always will be that way.

Look, if you will, at verse 13 again of our text, "So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife," but before we get to that part, back up to verse 9 where we have Boaz saying to the elders of all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today." So what do we see here? Boaz makes it very clear that the community at large in the family of faith are all involved in this covenant arrangement of marriage that he has made with Ruth.

You see, marriage has never been intended by God to be some private alliance between just two people; to be made just by those two people, lived out by just those two people, and then terminated as they wish by private choice. No. God has ordained marriage to be a local church and societal organization, if you will, or even organism, and it's always been this way and the church and the community always have an interest in the establishing and the living out of any family unit. The covenant model of marriage in Scripture is to be understood in personal and in social terms. In Genesis 2:24, God ordained marriage when he said, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife." This was a public thing that was happening.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Christian martyr of Germany under the Nazi regime, said this, "Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power for it is God's holy ordinance. In your love, you see only the heaven of your happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession but marriage is something more than personal, it's a status, it's an office that joins you together in the sight of God and in the sight of man." Now, I used to hear this a lot years ago, people would say, "Why go through a marriage ceremony? It's just a piece of paper." Well, the reason why there needs to be a marriage ceremony is because of the responsibility of your church family and the society to be there with you because they have a proper interest in the foundation of this new family group. Public witness is always an aspect of covenant making and Christian marriage is a covenant. It's more than just you two. God has ordained that your church family has a responsibility to you and your covenant and you, as a married couple, have the responsibility to your church family in this covenant. It's never meant to be lived isolated. It's one of the reasons why I hope God enables us to build a beautiful wedding chapel over there in our old auditorium so our young girls will feel comfortable getting married here so that most of the church family and the community can witness the marriage ceremony. I'm not saying it's sin if you don't have your wedding in your local church. I'm not saying that at all but I do want you to understand the principle involved.

Also I'd like to say not only that, but I think weddings should be festive and sometimes, too often perhaps, weddings are a little bit more like a funeral service than a festivity. You know, there's a human need for festivity. Human life needs moments set apart for celebration: birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, births and, of course, marriage. We need those times when we break the routine of life and, just to be honest, have a party. That's really what God did in ancient Israel when he gave them festival after festival, celebration after celebration, observance after observance that he required so that they would come together, get away from their work and their labors and just celebrate a good thing that God had done for them. The community needs these things. The community needs something good and wholesome to celebrate and a wedding provides this because a wedding is the public beginning of a private enterprise. Weddings are society's method of receiving and celebrating a new enterprise of love into its midst.

So the text tells us here that before the elders and all the people, Boaz makes public what's about to happen and they gave their blessing and agreement. You know, and I want to say this just a little bit tongue-in-cheek this morning, perhaps in our marriage

ceremonies today, the groom ought to get just a little more attention. Could I say that this morning? You know, it's really interesting, Ruth actually is at home with Naomi while all the public stuff is happening with Boaz in this setting but, you know, today it's right the opposite, in today's weddings, the groom is barely even noticed. The bride steals the entire show. She's in the paper. She has showers. She has teas. There are parties planned. The day of wedding, he's barely even noticed. He meekly follows the preacher in and stands there like, "When is this going to be over?" He stands and waits for the bride and all of a sudden she comes in and everybody stands. She gets all the attention. They play "Here Comes the Bride." Everybody kisses the bride. The only people that kiss the groom is his mom. The next day, she's in the paper. It describes her veil, her slippers, her flowers, her cake. Oh, and by the way, here's the groom.

Well, I'm not actually advocating any real changes there but in the Bible, you know it's right the opposite? In Revelation 1, Jesus returns as the glorious groom and everything in there is about how glorious he appears and looks. In Revelation 19, as Jesus returns to judge the earth and restore his kingdom and collect his people, it's all about the glories of Jesus, the groom. And in Revelation 19, as it continues and it does mention the bride, the church, it's shown that the bride is clothed in the righteousness of the groom, Jesus. So maybe we'll think about that but I honestly will not force you into any changes. Marriage is God's ordinance and it's to be involved the church family and society. We all have a role in each other's marriages. It's not just about you and your spouse. That's God's ordained standard.

2. I want to say a word about human life. We see a truth here about human life and how it is sacred. How it is sacred. The Bible tells us here in verse 13 that, "Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her." Now notice this, "And the LORD enabled her to conceive." Literally it means the Lord gave her conception. Conception doesn't just happen, the Lord gives conception. You probably saw on the television where scientists at Northwestern University have now videotape of the sperm fertilizing the egg and the very moment the fertilization occurs, there is a burst of light. I'm going to tell you what that is: that's the hand of God. God creates life in the womb of the woman because human life is sacred. It's different from all other life. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let Us make man in Our image." In Exodus, God gave us one of the commandments, "You shall not commit murder." Why? He doesn't say that about the animals, only about humans. Why? Because human life is sacred. It's unique. It's special. It's different. He told man to exercise dominion over the rest of the created order. The rest of the created order does not have the value, the worth or the dignity that God gave human beings.

The full genetic package of what is a human being is present at conception. All a one-celled human being in the womb of its mother needs is the right environment, some time and nutrition. That's all it needs and, by the way, all these little babies that were down here a while ago, do you know what they need? The right environment, time and nutrition. No difference. One is inside the womb, one is outside the womb. The pro-abortionists years ago used to say, "Well, it's not alive, it's just a blob of tissue." Well, science proved it's absolutely fully alive. They said, "Well, then if it's alive, then it's not a human being." Then science verified without dispute, no, the full genetic code of that

human being is present at the moment of conception. They said, "Well, if it is alive and it is a human being, well then, it's just not a person." Well then, maybe the mentally retarded child is not a person and maybe the senile senior adult is not a person. Should we just cast them away at will also?

Friends, human life is sacred from the moment of conception in the mother's womb and we will always stand for that truth and never shy away from it. This is God's word and this is God's truth and when we take actions as a people that cheapens human life, we are cultivating an overall decline in societal morals. When we begin to make decisions as to who lives and dies on the basis of whether it's convenient for the living, that is a very dangerous thing. The Alan Guttmacher Institute in their surveys found that only 7% of abortions are considered hard cases or maybe the mother's health is genuinely in jeopardy, something like that. Fully 93% of abortions are for convenience, just another form of birth control. America has lost her Christian worldview and America's worldview now has been replaced with a humanistic or secular progressive worldview and this worldview casts out everything, all spiritual values – all non-material values are erased. We've become materialistic. We're materialists. And their viewpoint is that only what is material, only what we have is all that there is, and so if anyone or anything comes between you and all that you have in this life, then they're expendable because this is all there is; there is no higher value to live for than just the material values of a material world.

And that's the new life worldview that we're living under in our country today so don't let a pregnancy or a child get in your way, just discard them. The feminists behind the pro-abortion movement believe that if a man can keep a woman pregnant and raising the kids, he can deny her any prominent role or self-actualization in the society. Man, it's time for Christian women to stand up and glory, and glory with confidence the esteemed role of motherhood and the preciousness of our children the Lord gives us as a gift. The Bible said in Jeremiah 1:15 that God knew Jeremiah – listen – before he formed him in the womb. In Psalm 139, God fully knew the Psalmist while he was in his mother's womb. And in Exodus 21, if an attacker hurts a pregnant woman and the baby is damaged and killed, then that attacker is also to be executed as the judgment of life for life. In the New Testament in John 1:15, John the Baptist is filled with the Spirit while in his mother's womb. You see, the womb contains more than just a body, the womb contains a living soul. A body can't be filled with the Spirit but a living soul can. In Luke 1:41, John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb as his mother comes in close association with Mary who is carrying the unborn Christ. John had prenatal determination of personality and character. In Galatians 1:15, the Apostle Paul says, "He was called from his mother's womb." Listen, when our Supreme Court declared that a woman had a constitutional right to kill her unborn child, they were not fulfilling the Constitution, they were rewriting the Constitution. Never in a million years did any of our Founding Fathers ever dream that we would somehow take something as unbiblical and vile and violent as abortion or even gay marriage and somehow declare that men have a constitutional right to such things. But that's what liberal activist judges do.

Boaz took Ruth, went into Ruth and the Lord gave her conception. So we've seen a little something about marriage. Marriage is a covenant relationship to be established and lived out in the loving, encouraging accountability of the local church family and in society; that human life from the moment of conception is sacred. And then thirdly, and praise be to God for this, we also have a clear word here in Ruth 4 that there is a redeemer. There is a redeemer and Boaz is a redeemer here because he took Ruth so they could bear a son to carry on the name of the deceased in Israel, but also the little baby is pictured as a redeemer here. But in all of these pictures of redeemer, the one who is truly and finally pictured is The Redeemer, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In Luke 24:27 Jesus is speaking to the disciples on the Emmaus Road and it says, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets," Jesus, "He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Year and years ago, 35, 36 years ago, I remember a preacher getting in the pulpit to preach and he said, "Alright, take out your hymnbook." He said, "No, not your songbook, the book that's about him." From Genesis to Revelation, this book is about Jesus Christ. It reveals him and how this picture of Boaz and the little baby born to Boaz and Ruth is a picture of Jesus.

Let's look at it together, two or three things. Two or three, actually seven, but I'll go quickly. 1. The Redeemer comes as a baby. The redemption is fully realized when the baby is born and takes the name of Elimelech in Israel. So no longer is Elimelech's name lost among the covenant people of God. But, look, there could have been a thousand ways God could have ordained this to happen but God ordained that the redemption comes through a baby and our redemption came not in the way any of the grand theologians of the day expected. Our redemption came through a little baby born to the virgin Mary, laid in a feed trough in Bethlehem.

2. The Redeemer comes to Bethlehem. That's where they come back to. It's not just a coincidence that the clearest narrative on the kinsman redeemer happens to a people who lived in the ancient city of Bethlehem. Ephratha is another name. It would be like Colbert County and Muscle Shoals where Ephratha and Bethlehem are the same place. And so the redeemer, Boaz, comes and they find that redeemer, Boaz, in Bethlehem, and that's where we found our Savior, born of Mary, born in Bethlehem.

3. The Redeemer comes in love and not law. Now, it was a law, it was the edict of God that you were required, you didn't have an option. Now, a lot of men did not want to do this but that's another mouth to feed, that's another financial obligation, but they were required by law if you were the nearest of kin and your brother had died, she's a widow, you must take her as a legal wife, bear a child to carry on your deceased brother's name. So Boaz, if the others refused, was legally bound as the nearest of kin to be the redeemer in this case but the text makes it very very clear Boaz wasn't functioning under law, he went higher than that, he loved Ruth.

Have you ever heard that love fulfills the law? He didn't have to take the Old Testament Canon out to Boaz and say, "Here's what the Bible says you must do." Boaz would have looked at you and said, "Put that aside! I love Ruth! I rejoice to take her as mine and bear up a son to bear the name of her grandfather, Elimelech, back in the land of Israel." And

that's exactly what Jesus did. It was the edict of God from the foundation of the world that Jesus would be the Lamb slain who would save his children from eternal loss, but in God the Father's heart and Jesus' heart, they didn't come under the woeful burden of, "Oh, I've got to do this because the edict has been established." No, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The motive of God's heart and the motive of his Son, Jesus' heart, in coming to redeem us from sin is love and Boaz so beautifully pictures that.

4. The Redeemer's greatness was proclaimed by others at his birth. In verse 11, "the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.'" So just praise after praise after praise at the birth of this redeemer born to Boaz and Ruth and isn't it true when Jesus was born the angels appear glorifying God and praising God. The shepherds hear the word from the angels and the Bible says they begin to rejoice and go run to see him. Sometime later, the wise men journey, following the star, and they come and worship and praise him. The Redeemer is praised for his greatness at his birth.

5. The Redeemer restores what sin has taken away and more. It was likely sin for Elimelech to take his two sons and his wife, Naomi, and leave the Promised Land and go into pagan Moab looking for sustenance as if God couldn't be faithful to his own. Sin caused this problem. Elimelech dies, the two sons die, Naomi is brokenhearted and left destitute. She has nothing. But notice what the Bible says, look at it there in verse 17, if you will, "The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!' So they named him Obed," which means worshiper, "He is the father of Jesse, the father of David." Now, don't just pass over that. Naomi, who's absolutely destitute of husband and male sons; Naomi, brokenhearted, has no role in having a family name in Israel is now going to have a son and not just any son, but the son who would be the great, great, great grandfather of Jesse who was the father of David, of whose line Jesus the Savior will be born. She went from the lowest of low to the highest of high bloodlines in all the nation of Israel.

The Redeemer takes what sin has taken away and he pays it back and far more. Far more. Far more than you could ever imagine. Has sin taken away from you? Yes, even your own sin. I'm telling you, there's a Redeemer who in grace gives back more than sin can ever take away. Listen to me: the Bible says in Ephesians that concerning Jesus in all things he, Jesus, must have the preeminence. In Matthew, the Bible says all authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth. In Revelation, he returns and on his chest is a banner that says he is King of kings and Lord of lords. In 2 Timothy and in Revelation, the Bible says Jesus will reign – now listen – and we will reign with him as joint heirs of his kingdom. Look, when God redeems us, we do not just get back what Adam and Eve lost in the garden of Eden, we get that back and infinitely better because the new kingdom Jesus will establish and let us in it with him is far, far greater than the old paradise Adam and Eve knew in the garden of Eden. The Redeemer gives back all that sin takes away and he gives much, much, much more.

6. He gives new life. Look at verse 15. This isn't just any...only God could have written this. Verse 15, the ladies of Israel say to Naomi rejoicing with her over her blessing, "May he also be to you a restorer of life." What a way to word that. Do you know why it's worded that way? Because that pictures beautifully what Jesus does. In John 10:28, Jesus says, "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish." Oh, what a picture of Jesus this is.

Then lastly, there are many more but I'm just going to mention one more: this Redeemer keeps those that he redeems. Notice again this is true for Naomi. Her redeemer, the ladies of Israel say in verse 15, "May he also be to you a restorer of life," look, "and a sustainer of your old age." All the way to the end, Naomi, may this one whose born to you be the one who takes care of you all the way to the end. And my friend, Jesus, is one who redeems us but he does not keep us to the end because in Jesus' kingdom, there is no end. He keeps us for all eternity. John 6:39, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." Listen, listen, listen: Jesus finds his sheep and he keeps them. He finds his sheep and he keeps them. John 18:9, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one."

Do you want to be a really, truly, great mother? Then you must, you must know Jesus Christ. We're going to do something different on this Mother's Day. I'm not just going to ask mothers to stand, I'm going to ask all female persons, high school age and up, to stand right now. Would you do that? All female persons, high school age and up, stand. Now, if you're a guest here today, I'm not your pastor, I'm not requiring you to do anything and I will not embarrass anyone but here's my challenge to you today. First of all, to all of you ladies who are younger and not yet married, on this Mother's Day I exhort you to dedicate yourselves that you will marry only in the Lord and that you will live before your children, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren, a humble dependence upon and a genuine love for your faithful Savior. There is nothing more valuable than your children seeing that you are humbled before your Savior and that you love your Savior.

Now, secondly, for those of you who are not as young but you're childless. First of all, remember Naomi. God can do things you know not of. This could change. But secondly to you dear ladies, I would say reject all self-pity and glory in the special ministry and role God has given you. I challenge you to specially dedicate yourself to the Lord's work and esteem the great value that you ladies have had to so many other mothers. I've watched you. I have seen you. I've been the recipient of those whom God did not give children and they poured their life into me. So please don't let Satan take that from you. You are valuable in God's work and in God's church and I commend you for the way you serve and use that value to help so many others raise these children for the glory of God. Can I get an amen there?

Now for you ladies who do have children and maybe grandchildren, even great grandchildren. The first thing I want to say is: you're doing a lot of stuff right. I don't care what the world and Satan and what your own conscience...you're doing a lot of stuff right

so I praise God for you for that. Secondly, I would challenge you today to rededicate your hearts, ladies, to God's wisdom, that you will esteem God's wisdom above man's; that you will make from your heart your priority to love your husbands, to love your children, and to keep your homes. I'm not saying you don't do other things, but I'm asking you from your hearts today to reaffirm your dedication to God's wisdom, "I will love my husband, love my children, and keep my home."

Then, finally, for all of us again, that you will live before your children a humble dependence upon and a deep love for your faithful Savior. Ladies, you can dot every "t" and cross every "i" of all the books you read and the seminars you go to about how to raise kids but if they don't see in your heart that momma is under authority and momma's a sinner who needs a Savior, then it doesn't work. It just doesn't work. You see, God didn't just give you a manual to raise good kids, he gives you a manual to raise kids who love God and they need to see moms with that humble dependence upon and genuine love for their faithful Savior. Moms, how I salute you and thank God for you and for all the ladies of Grace Life and the way you minister in all the ways God has given you to minister. Don't you let the world lie to you. You are valuable and critical to what God is doing. It will all be made clear when he returns.

Let me pray for you while you're standing.

Father, thank you for these dear ladies. For the younger ladies who are not yet married and do not yet have children, O God, even at this moment, even in a freshman in high school's heart, I pray this little girl will say, "O Jesus, I do dedicate my life to one day live before my children a humble dependence on my Lord Jesus and a genuine love for my Lord Jesus. May my children see that more than anything." And for these precious ladies who for whatever reason, Lord, do not have children, O God, may they know how the church esteems them. May they grasp anew how vitally important their ministry is and how they have already proven to us how essential they are to help be moms to so many kids in so many ways and I am one of those and I thank you for the investment that many made in my life when I was a young college student even here at Grace Life Church. And now, Lord, for all of the rest of the moms and grandmothers and great grandmothers, Lord, bless them. Give them the grace this day to rededicate their hearts to the wisdom of God; to put first in their hearts to love their husbands, to love their children, and to keep their homes. And Lord, encourage them today. The world so lies to these ladies and tries to beat them up and distract them. Let them know they are precious in your sight. Bless them. Encourage them. And I pray none of them have to work today, cook a meal today, but just have a day to themselves. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.