

Message #8

Ruth 4:1-12

A while back I was in a discussion with someone who was questioning whether or not smoking marijuana was the will of God. The person was wondering whether or not they should allow pot smoking in their home. My answer was simple and to the point. No, it is not the will of God, and one of the key reasons we know that is that it is against Federal Law. Not to mention that every heroin addict started by smoking pot. That is not to say that everyone who smoked pot became a heroin addict. But all heroin addicts and drug addicts smoked pot.

God is a God who works within laws. God is a God who works within customs and cultures. His word transcends all things and never is that point more evident than in this text in Ruth.

Ruth had gone home to Naomi from being with Boaz and Naomi told her to sit tight to see what would happen. Boaz was a man of integrity. He was a man of the word of God. He was a man interested in obeying the word of God and conforming to the customs and culture of the place where he lived, which was Bethlehem. What we see here is this:

GOD IS SOVEREIGNLY WORKING OUT HIS WILL IN THE LIVES OF HIS PEOPLE AND HE WORKS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF HIS WORD AND CUSTOMS AND CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP TO ACCOMPLISH IT.

In the opening verse of the book of Ruth, we learn that this story took place in the times of the Judges. Judges would sit at the gates and they made various judgments. The judges were supposed to take the word of God and base their judgments on what God's word said.

God had laid out His word and His guidelines for making judgments, but those things were not always followed.

When we come to this part of the narrative, we come to the part where Boaz must make a decision as to what he will do. We may remember that Naomi told Ruth that they needed to wait to see what Boaz would do.

In Ruth 4, Boaz takes front and center stage and there are a series of specific actions that occur here that are decent and orderly.

ACTION #1 - Boaz went to the gate and sat down. 4:1a

This town gate was extremely important. The text says he "went up" to the gate which does suggest this was topographically up on some hill or perch. This was the place where the leaders of the city would sit to hear complaints and settle various disputes. This was a key judicial decision spot.

The connective "now" that begins the verse suggests that Boaz immediately went to the gate after leaving the threshing floor and didn't even go home first.

The fact that Boaz went there and sat down indicates he is there on some judicial matter. We know from Ruth 3:13 that Boaz wanted to redeem Ruth. So the fact that he is sitting down at this gate means he is going there for that purpose. He is following the word of God and he is following the law.

ACTION #2 - Boaz asks the closest relative to sit down. **4:1b**

We never learn this guy's name. The reason is probably because he was not worthy of naming and mentioning in the word of God because he was not willing to obey the word of God in regard to fulfilling responsibilities as a close relative redeemer.

We may recall from **Ruth 3:12** that when it came to Naomi and Ruth, Boaz was not the closest relative. There was a relative closer than he was. As Boaz sat down he spotted the "close relative" (goel) who was probably walking by on his way to his field to do his work. So when Boaz saw the closest relative (goel) he called out to him and asked him to sit down, which he did.

It is interesting that Boaz sees this man, he identifies him by saying turn aside "my friend" (Hebrew - peloni almoni). The actual words in Hebrew seem to suggest "Hey You, turn aside here and sit down." Boaz does know this closest relative, but he doesn't address him by name and just uses a generic invitation.

Now of course we see again the silent, hidden hand of the sovereignty of God in this. Boaz is sitting down and he spots the nearest relative walking by and he asks him to sit down. The timing of all of this is sovereignly controlled by God.

ACTION #3 - Boaz rounds up ten Elders to make a legal decision. **4:2**

Boaz had to find enough men to make a legal decision on this matter, so he went and found ten. These men would have had to leave their work and go to the gate to hear this and Boaz found ten willing to do that.

These ten were obviously citizens of Bethlehem and they were elders. Boaz brought them to the gate and asked that they sit down. He works within the framework of the Elders and leaders who were there at the time when this event happened. He works within the framework of leadership structure.

We must remember that Ruth has asked Boaz to consider marrying her, so he handles this with Biblical integrity. He is not sneaking around behind the backs of the leaders; he brings them right into it.

ACTION #4 - Boaz brings up the matter of buying the field/land from Naomi. **4:3-5**

There are two O.T. legal principles that are brought up in this discussion:

- 1) The redemption of land (Lev.25:25-30);
- 2) The responsibility of a near relative in regard to marriage (Deut.25:5-10).

Neither is a real precise interpretation of the word of God. Land that was assigned in the Promised Land was never supposed to leave the family. Levitical Law made that point very clear (Lev. 25:25-30). If a family became poor and needed to sell their land, the nearest relative was to purchase it. But the land was to be returned to the original family every 50 years (Lev. 25:8). So there was a real commitment here if one bought this land.

When Boaz had the nearest relative and the ten elders sitting at the gate, he brought this first matter pertaining to the land right up immediately. There are five stated realities he brings up:

Reality #1 - Naomi has returned and needs to sell her land that belonged to Elimelech. **4:3**

Boaz opens up with a statement that the reasons he has called this meeting is that Naomi has made a decision to sell her land. Now this in itself is odd in view of the fact that widows were not permitted to sell the land because the land was to be given to the family.

We learn from Numbers 27:9-11 that if a man died without a son or daughter, his property would pass to his brothers and if he had no brothers it would pass to his father's brothers (uncles) and if his father had no brothers then it was to pass to the nearest relative from his own family. There is no hint that a widow had a right to sell the property.

Naomi was a widow who apparently needed money. To get money to live on she needed to sell her land. Boaz wanted her to get some money so he develops this point in his presentation. She was in no position to farm it, and she could use the money so she was hoping to sell it to a close relative in the family.

Reality #2 – You, who are the nearest relative, need to buy it before these Elders. **4:4a**

It was the responsibility of nearest relative to buy that land (Lev. 25:25). In Leviticus 25:25 we read: "If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold."

So we may assume that the nearest relative was either a brother of Elimelech or closest to being a relative of Elimelech and Boaz was one step removed from this.

Reality #3 -If you do not want to redeem it, then tell us so I will redeem it. **4:4b**

Boaz says if you want to but this, then buy it, but if you don't want to buy it, I am next in line and I will buy it. Boaz was next in line for redemption.

Reality #4 - The nearest relative said that he would redeem the land. **4:4c**

At this point, the nearest relative said he would go ahead and buy the field.

Reality #5 - Boaz says if you buy the field from Naomi, you must also acquire and marry Ruth the Moabitess. **4:5**

Now Boaz brings up one more matter and that is if you purchase the land from Naomi, you must also commit to purchasing and marrying Ruth the Moabitess. So if you take the land deal, you must also marry Ruth in the deal. This would be a package deal.

By mentioning that she is a Moabitess, it would seem that he is putting this in the mind of the near relative as perhaps a negative, so he won't do it.

Many in Israel did not favor the Moabites and by bringing this point up, Boaz was probably counting on the fact that this could prevent the nearest relative from making the deal. It is one thing to buy someone's land; it is quite another to buy the land and marry a Moabite woman in the deal.

To establish his argument he says the nearest relative needs to marry her to see to it that the family name is still here. Now in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 we learn that if a husband died without a child, the brother had a responsibility to marry the wife and produce a child.

Frankly, there does not seem to be any precedence for this near relative having to marry a Moabite woman. We know that this near relative was not the brother of Mahlon who died because his brother died, too. So in all reality, neither the near relative or Boaz were technically responsible to marry her.

Boaz is not doing anything wrong here. In fact, he is doing it right out in front at the gate in front of the elders. Any of them could have said, where do you see in the Law that this near relative who is not a brother has to marry a Moabitess? But no one raised the argument.

What we conclude is that either this was a cultural application of the law they had made in Deuteronomy 25 or no one knew precisely what the law actually said. In the times of the Judges, everyone was doing that which was right in their own eyes and they apparently were doing that with the Bible.

ACTION #5 - Boaz is told by the closest relative to go ahead and redeem it. **4:6**

The closest relative made a decision that he did not want to get in on this redemption deal. He wanted the land, but he did not want Ruth. So he said he could not redeem it for himself because he would jeopardize his own inheritance. I am not actually sure what he meant by I will jeopardize my own inheritance, but he told Boaz go ahead and you do it.

He may have thought for one thing, he would have to lay out the money for the field to buy it. Then he would have to provide for Ruth and her family, which would include Naomi. Also this would mean that in the end, his own inheritance would need to be changed to include these other people. Plus the man may have already been married with children and thought this is not a good investment for me and there is way too much baggage in this deal.

So the nearest relative said, I cannot afford to make this deal so you go ahead.

ACTION #6 - Boaz is given a sandal from the nearest relative giving him the legal right. **4:7-8**

Notice carefully that the text says this was the custom “in former times in Israel.” Obviously when the book of Ruth was written, it was no longer a custom.

The giving of a sandal comes from Deuteronomy 25:9. If someone refused to marry the wife of a childless brother, the woman was to pull a sandal off his foot and spit in his face. So what we have here are bits and pieces of a Bible verse being used in this deal.

Apparently there was a custom developed in this culture that if a legal agreement was made concerning the redemption of land, the closest relative was to take off a sandal and give it to the next relative in line.

So this was a symbol of handing over the right of redemption to Boaz.

ACTION #7 - Boaz responds to all of this. **4:9-10**

There are a series of responses Boaz has here:

Response #1 - Boaz addresses the elders and all the people. **4:9a**

Boaz does this out in front of everyone. There is nothing improper or clandestine about this. When people are doing things they shouldn't do, they are usually not out in the open with it.

Response #2 - Boaz declares that he has bought the land from Naomi and all that belonged to Elimelech and Chilion and Machlon. **4:9b**

We may conclude that he bought the land and the house and any animals or things that went with it.

Response #3 - Boaz declares that he is redeeming and marrying Ruth the Moabitess. **4:10**

His argument is so that Mahlon's widow would not die childless to preserve his name in Bethlehem. This is the first time in the book that we learn which brother was married to Ruth.

Frankly, it would seem at this point that Boaz's primary motive was not to buy land, it was to marry Ruth. Even though the preservation of a name was critical to Israel and even though the purchase would be a financial boost to Naomi and even though the land would stay in the family, the fact is Boaz had his eye on Ruth.

ACTION #8 - All the people and elders legally agree to sanction this. **4:11-12**

All the people and elders were very supportive of this:

Reaction #1 - They announced they were legal witnesses. **4:11a**

Reaction #2 - They asked that the LORD would make Ruth like Rachel and Leah who became Great women in Israel. **4:11b**

This is an amazing blessing that they pronounce here. Rachel and Leah had 13 children between them and were mothers of the entire nation Israel. They are asking God to bless Boaz and Ruth at that same level.

Reaction #3 - They asked that God would make Boaz wealthy and famous in Bethlehem. **4:11c**

Bethlehem would become one of the most sacred places in this world

Reaction #4 - They asked that God would bless their offspring. **4:12**

The offspring of this relationship between Boaz and Ruth would eventually include David and Jesus Christ. God did bless the offspring.

There are three parting thoughts:

- 1) Doing God's will is initially costly.
- 2) Doing God's will is always profitable.
- 3) Doing God's will always bring great blessings.