

Ruth 4:1-12
God's Hand in our Wisdom
WRCoB 7.5.20

The Book of Ruth is a small book of four chapters
Squeezed between the Book of Judges
And the Book of 1 Samuel.

If you didn't know where it was
You'd most likely never chance upon it.

The Bible places it there, chronologically
Because it takes place when Judges ruled Israel.

Though the story is small in focus
With its lens on one family in Bethlehem

The seemingly minor events taking place within its chapters
Play out in God's overall purposes.

The narrator draws you in innocently believing
You are simply reading a story
That starts out bitter and ends sweet.

The characters struggle with every-day existences
Doing all they can to better themselves.

There's not a lot of "God talk" in the story.

You almost get the impression
The characters aren't very religious.

Nor does God appear to take an active role in the story.

For a Bible story, God is strangely absent.

But as we read on

And the pieces of the puzzle begin to fit together

We begin to see with clarity God's handiwork

Without actually having God say or do anything!

To me, that's the genius of the story.

Because in real life, God chooses to remain anonymous.

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We left the story last Sunday with Boaz and Ruth

Spending the night together on the threshing floor.

Boaz leaves in the morning to settle matters quickly

Anxious to take Ruth as his wife.

1

1 So Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there. When the family redeemer he had mentioned came by, Boaz called out to him, "Come over here, friend. I want to talk to you." So they sat down together. 2 Then Boaz called ten leaders from the town and asked them to sit as witnesses.

It is somewhat telling that in Hebrew

What has been translated here as friend

Could be more accurately translated as

"Mr. So and So." or, "Mr. What's His Face!"

Boaz calls out to his cousin, Naomi's nearest of kin
In such an impersonal way

It makes you wonder what sort of man he was
For Boaz to not even mention his name!

Just what sort of a person was he?

Boaz goes to the town gate
Because that is where important business took place.

He sought out ten prominent citizens to serve as witnesses.

Because this is how one documented important transactions.

A business deal was mentally recorded and made binding
In the presence of eyewitnesses.

2

3 And Boaz said to the family redeemer, "You know Naomi, who came back from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 I felt that I should speak to you about it so that you can redeem it if you wish. If you want the land, then buy it here in the presence of these witnesses. But if you don't want it, let me know right away, because I am next in line to redeem it after you. "The man replied, "All right, I'll redeem it."

Land?

Did someone mention land?

Did we know anything about land so far in the story?

It's funny too

Because land is such an important part of an inheritance.

Relatives will do all kinds of evil things for property!

And whether it's ancient Palestine or modern-day Virginia

When it comes to inheritances

Land is always contentious.

Land is the ace up Boaz's sleeve.

Boaz, being an honest man

Though as we'll find out, a cunningly honest man

Offers the nearer-relative first dibs.

He does so in the presence of the witnesses

So all may hear the cousin's response.

"If you want the land say so, and it's yours.

If not, seeing I'm the next closest relative

I'll take it."

The family redeemer grabs the chance.

3

5 Then Boaz told him, "Of course, your purchase of the land from Naomi also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way, she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family." 6 "Then I can't redeem it," the family

redeemer replied, "because this might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot do it." 7 In those days it was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of purchase to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction. 8 So the other family redeemer drew off his sandal as he said to Boaz, "You buy the land."

There are strings attached to the land, says Boaz, namely

To get the land

You also get to care for the grief-stricken old widow
And her Moabite daughter-in-law.

Here is where Boaz proves his cunning prowess.

Neither Boaz nor "what's-his-name"

Are actually brothers to Elimelech.

And according to the Jewish levirate law

Only brothers of the deceased were legally required
To marry the deceased's widow.

Since they were probably cousins instead

There wasn't a legal obligation
To marry Naomi or Ruth.

There was, however, a social/cultural obligation

That, if there were no brothers
The extended family was required in some way
To care for the dead relatives' family.

This is where Boaz proves his craftiness.

For the nearest relative to stand there
In front of the gathered eye-witnesses

And claim the right to Elimelech's land
While refusing to care for the widows

Exposed him for what he was
A greedy and exploitive next of kin.

Busted!

He turns to Boaz and reneges, "No, you take the land."

4

9 Then Boaz said to the leaders and to the crowd standing around, "You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. 10 And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today."

Surrounded by the eye-witnesses
And the crowd that had gathered around

The no-named cousin takes his sandal off
Hands it to Boaz as a sign of the agreement.

The narrator has to explain to his listeners
That "in those days" this was the way
An agreement was binding.

Boaz then declares for all to hear
That he will acquire the lands of Elimelech
And marry Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon.

Notice how in Boaz's proclamation
Ruth who they always called the Moabite widow
Or the Moabite daughter-in-law
Now is referred to as Mahlon's widow.

Ruth's identity is slowly evolving.

5

**11 Then the leaders and all the people standing there
replied, "We are witnesses! May the LORD make the
woman who is now coming into your home like Rachel
and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended!
May you be great in Ephrathah and famous in
Bethlehem. 12 And may the LORD give you descendants
by this young woman who will be like those of our
ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah."**

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The ten elders that Boaz had called as eyewitnesses
And the crowd that had gathered around
In choral proclamation

Give their blessing to Ruth
Who is no longer viewed as a foreigner.

They liken her to the Hebrew matriarchs, Rachel and Leah.

They seek God's blessings on her

That she, Ruth, like Rachel and Leah

Will be the mother of many Jewish descendants.

~~

Boaz has redeemed Ruth.

He has provided for Ruth and Naomi

And for their future generations.

They will not be lost nor forgotten.

In redeeming Ruth, Boaz, in his old age, begins anew.

Like Abraham in his old age

God blesses Boaz with a legacy

That even his wildest imagination

Would never imagine.

Along with his marriage to Ruth, the woman he loved

He adds more land

To his already prosperous farming enterprise.

Not too bad, Boaz! Well done!

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Like a good ole western

The good guy with the white hat wins.

He marries the young attractive widow

And gets the ranch to boot!

The Book of Ruth is a story of redemption.

It is about putting the interest of others before your own.

Ruth's quiet but firm devotion to her mother-in-law.

Naomi's crafty but loving spirit for Ruth's welfare.

And Boaz's shrewd business dealings with his cousin.

Characteristics that benefit those in our story

In the present state of affairs.

They worked incredibly hard

To accomplish what was best for each other.

They acted with integrity and grace

Even though they connived, took risks

And were shrewd in business dealings.

They did what they thought was right.

However, we see in their work of redemption with a small r

The work of God's Redemption with a big R.

For anytime there is redeeming graces at work

There in ancient Palestine

Or here in the present-day

God's greater Redeeming purposes take root

And we are that much closer to kingdom living.

And whether the characters in our story knew it or not
God was working through them for greater purposes.

Did they know they were involved in something other than
Their daily struggles of existence?

Did they know that what they did
Would have incredibly far-reaching effects?

No, they didn't.
And nor do you!

They just did the best they knew how
And that's all we can ask of ourselves.

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And so with your God-given mind and abilities
Your love for God and for each other
And Christ's redeeming love in your soul

Go out and do the best you can
To make a difference in this world.

Because no matter where you might find yourself
And no matter what you might find yourself doing

If you are faithful to God and God's purpose
You, too, will be God's handiwork
For the glory of God and our neighbors' good!