

## The romance of redemption (Part 5)

### *Question to consider:*

Think about Naomi's walk of faith. Chapter 1 started with disobedience and ended with her having no hope for the future. Having been re-introduced to Boaz through Ruth in Chapter 2 led to a renewed confidence in God which enabled her to hope for a better future. What does this teach us about our own journey of faith with God?

### **Ruth 3.1-10 (NIV)**

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for." <sup>2</sup> Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. <sup>3</sup> Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup> When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." <sup>5</sup> "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. <sup>6</sup> So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. <sup>7</sup> When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. <sup>8</sup> In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet! <sup>9</sup> "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family." <sup>10</sup> "The Lord bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

### v1 One day (Then)

We are not told how much time elapsed since the end of Ruth 2. Given that Boaz worked at harvesting along with his workers, this day was likely after both harvests had ended.

Notice the time periods:

- Over 10 years whiz past (1.1-22)
- Then one day (2.1-22)
- Over 3 months whiz past (2.23)
- Then one day and night, and the next day (3.1-4.12)

v1 My daughter, I must find a home (*rest*) for you, where you will be well provided for. The same word as in 1.9 "May the Lord grant that each of you will find *rest* in the home of another husband". In this context it referred to a rest and security obtained through marriage, as implied in 1.9. Naomi had three challenges:

1. How could the name of Elimelek be maintained among the tribes of Israel, given that he and both their sons were dead?
2. How could their family inheritance be protected?
3. How could she ensure Ruth's welfare?

Point 2 needs further clarification. In 4.5 we see that Naomi had land. Why then was she poor? Could she not derive income from it or sell it? The implication is that Elimelek and Naomi had leased it to someone else before leaving for Moab, probably due to the famine. Only its use could be sold, because the land itself belonged to God (Leviticus 25.23).

The lease could be bought out at any time by a certain type of close relative, a goel.

Leviticus 25.25 If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold.

That chapter goes on to describe other forms of redemption. For instance:

Leviticus 25.47-48 “If ... any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves ... <sup>48</sup> they retain the right of redemption after they have sold themselves. One of their relatives may redeem them

Our kinsman-redeemer redeemed us from the slavery of sin!

Points 1 and 2 had one solution, but point 3 a different one. Naomi would have known that Boaz was not the nearest kinsman-redeemer.

On the one hand, if Ruth married the nearest kinsman-redeemer:

- It might solve point 1, but only if Ruth had a child with him and given that she had been married to Mahlon for 10 years without having children, that might not happen.
- It would solve point 2, in that she would then have the right to use the land.
- But it would not necessarily solve point 3. She knew Boaz would be a good husband to Ruth. Her actions suggest that she wasn't confident that the other man would be.

On the other hand, Naomi had witnessed the growing relationship between Ruth and Boaz over the past three months. A marriage to Boaz would solve point 3, but not points 1 and 2, unless the nearer kinsman-redeemer relinquished his right of redemption.

Two laws come together here:

1. The law of redemption (Leviticus 25.23-25, 47-55) whereby a close relative can redeem land on behalf of another close relative.
2. The law of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25.5-10), which dealt with the situation of a childless widow. She could go to the next of kin and put a claim on him to take her as his wife to raise up children for the family of the deceased.

By instructing Ruth as she did here, we see that her primary focus was Ruth's welfare. Naomi never raises the issue of getting an heir for her deceased husband. Had that been her intention, she would have looked for an opportunity involving the nearer kinsman, not Boaz. Instead, as a loving mother and as was customary for Jewish parents (Genesis 24.3-4), she sought to arrange a marriage, but one she knew would make Ruth happy. Over the past three months Naomi had put a plan together and she acted when she saw an opportunity. As in 2.22-23, and as she probably had done over those 3 months, here again Naomi coaches Ruth in culturally appropriate behaviour.

Naomi's plan meant that she would have to renounce her own claim to her kinsman-redeemer and give it to Ruth, the younger widow. Her love for Ruth was evident in her unselfish action. She knew that if Ruth remained an unprotected widow in a foreign land, life could be very hard for her.

Naomi took the initiative when an opportunity presented itself. Was she acting according to God's will or again just doing what is right in her own eyes (Judges 21.25)? How is what

Naomi did here different from what she did at the start of Ruth 1? In Ruth 1 she went opposite to the direction God had said to go and her sons married women whom God had said not to marry. She knew that her choices were contrary to what God had already said. But here in Ruth 3 the situation is different. Isaiah 30.21 demonstrates this: *Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left* (NKJV). The Living Bible puts it in simpler language: *And if you leave God's paths and go astray, you will hear a voice behind you say, "No, this is the way; walk here."* If we know God has said not to do something and do it anyway, as Naomi did in chapter 1, that is clearly disobedient and not an act of faith. But if we do not know God's view, and have not heard his voice telling us to go another way, then as Naomi did here, we go forward with faith, trusting that if we begin to follow the wrong path, God will correct us.

We are not told just how Naomi knew exactly what was going on and that the very night had come for that crucial occasion. However, she knew what she was doing. The plan that Naomi proposed was full of risk and danger. Ruth would expose herself to the possibility of humiliation, or worse, rape. But Naomi knew the character of Boaz and rested the whole scheme upon what she knew about his honour and integrity.

v2 and 7 Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor ... <sup>7</sup> he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile

When the winnowing was done, the farmer normally stayed with the grain at night, camping out on the threshing floor to ensure that the harvest was not stolen (1 Samuel 23.1).



Winnowing consisted of throwing the mixture of straw, chaff, and grain up into the wind by means of a fork with large teeth. The worthless chaff was blown away from the winnower, the straw less far, while the valuable heavier kernels of grain fell back onto the threshing floor. The separation is the result of a breeze that usually blows off the

Mediterranean from 4-5 pm until sunset. The wind however must not be too strong, for then even the heavy valuable portions of the grain would be blown away with the lighter chaff. In summer the west wind blows very strongly in the afternoon but drops off in the evening, so that the evening hours provide the most desirable wind conditions. To best take advantage of this natural phenomenon the threshing floors were usually on elevated parcels ground with a hard packed surface. In threshing, the grain was beaten out from the stalks with flails or was trodden over by oxen. The grain was then removed from the threshing floor and placed in heaps to be sold or stored in granaries. Threshing and winnowing were a time of great festivity and rejoicing.

v3 Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes  
Ruth prepared herself before going to the lord of the harvest and kinsman-redeemer.  
Similarly Joseph (Genesis 41.14) and Esther (Esther 5.1) prepared themselves before they went to the Pharaoh/emperor, the king of kings.

Why did Naomi encourage Ruth to do this at night, rather than in day time and in a public space? This reference to putting on appropriate clothing suggests that Ruth had been wearing mourning clothes up to this time, because her brother-in-law and husband had recently died. That would also explain why Boaz had not acted on his love for her. The kind of clothes that Ruth was wearing probably indicated to everyone that she was still mourning the loss of her husband. Boaz would have respected that and not pursued anything while she was still in mourning. Naomi tells Ruth that now is the time to change those clothes.

v4 uncover his feet and lie down ... v9 Spread the corner of your garment over me  
Embroidered on the hem of a person's garment was their rank. This is similar to military personnel who have it on their collar. The hem was the border, fringe, bottom edge of the garment.

- The fringes of Levitical garments identified them as Levites (Exodus 28.33-34)
- David removed Saul's hem in the cave where Saul was sleeping (1 Samuel 24.4). In ancient Mesopotamia (3,100 to 539 BC, modern Kuwait to southern Turkey) to cut off the hem was to strip a person of their authority.
- God's covenant with Israel is expressed as "I spread the corner of my garment over you" (Ezekiel 16.8). This is the only verse in the Bible where this expression is used of lovers. Here God is describing Israel as a young woman whom he took for his wife (as in Ruth and in Revelation 5). It meant that God spread his authority and protection over the nation.
- Matthew 14.35-36: People brought all their sick to him <sup>36</sup> and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.
- Luke 8.43-44: a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. <sup>44</sup> She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

Ruth boldly, yet humbly, sought her rights. The word for 'garment' here is used in its plural form in 2.12 for the 'wings' of God, again drawing our attention to Boaz as symbolic of our redeemer.

In chapter 2 we saw that Ruth could have demanded her right to glean, but chose the path of humility instead. Similarly here, she could have publicly demanded her right to be taken as wife by the kinsman-redeemer. She did in this act go to claim that right, expecting Boaz to marry her and raise up a family to perpetuate the name of Elimelek. But Naomi wisely counselled Ruth to not come as a victim demanding her rights, but as a humble servant, trusting in the goodness of her kinsman-redeemer. She was effectively saying to Boaz, "I respect you, I trust you, and I put my life in your hands." In those days, uncovering his feet and lying down there was understood to be the role of a servant – to lay at their master's feet and be ready for any command of the master. So, when Naomi told Ruth to lie down at Boaz's feet, she told her to come to him in a totally humble, submissive way. Her action was reinforced with her words "I am your servant Ruth" (2.9).

v4-6 He will tell you what to do.”<sup>5</sup> “I will do whatever you say ...<sup>6</sup> did everything her mother-in-law told her to do

Ruth does everything Naomi told her to do, with **one major exception**: when Boaz wakes up in the night and finds a woman next to him, Ruth does not wait to be told what to do by Boaz, but instead tells Boaz what he should do (3:9). As in chapter 2, here again Ruth takes the initiative.

As we saw in chapter 1, here we again see the mutual love Ruth and Naomi have for each other. In v1 Naomi acts in an unselfish manner to achieve what is best for Ruth. Here, if Ruth had let Boaz tell her what to do, Boaz might have proposed marriage, achieving what she desired, and fulfilling Naomi’s plan, which was for Ruth’s welfare, and for her protection. But instead of letting Boaz tell her what to do, Ruth invoked the kinship-redeemer law, thereby ensuring that Naomi’s land and family line were protected, even if it meant she ended up marrying, not Boaz, but the nearer kinsman-redeemer. She acts in Naomi’s best interests, rather than her own.

This also demonstrated again that Ruth was clean on the inside. In v3 Naomi had been concerned with Ruth’s outward appearance. But God looks at the heart and here we see her selflessness – the thing that had impressed the unnamed servant (Ruth 2.6-7; Genesis 24).

### ***The scene***

Imagine how fast her pulse was racing when Boaz woke up. Ruth was effectively saying something like “I would like to be the one to whom you pledge your faithfulness and with whom you make a marriage covenant.”

v8 In the middle of the night something startled the man

Since Boaz had been there to protect against thieves, it must have given him quite a shock to wake up and know someone was there. But his shock quickly turned to wondering, when he found out the visitor was a woman.

Boaz had just woken up and after identifying herself, Ruth said this. There had to have been an immense silence while Boaz considered what she had said and what his response should be.

It was midnight, they were under the stars, and he was looking into the face of the woman he loved, covered with his own cloak.

To Ruth waiting for Boaz’s response probably felt like an eternity.

v10 The Lord bless you ... This kindness (*hesed*)

The word ‘hesed’ appears 248 times in the Bible. It is rendered as “kindness”, “loyalty”, “love” or “faithfulness”. It is **a full on faithfully committed act of love**. The word appears three times in Ruth: 1.8, 2.20, 3.10. Here in v10 Boaz is impressed. He had witnessed Ruth’s commitment to his relative, Naomi. Everything she did was selfless. She was determined to do all she could to ensure Naomi’s survival. The hesed she did in v10 was done for Naomi, not Boaz and not for herself. Ruth’s hesed in chapters one and three run parallel to God’s act of hesed in chapter two. In 2.20, Naomi praises God’s hesed saying his “hesed has not forsaken the living or the dead!” The difference between God’s hesed and Ruth’s is that God’s is done despite Naomi’s bitterness against him. There is nothing that warrants God’s hesed.

Every prayer in Ruth is a prayer of blessing, and God answered every one! Naomi asked that God deal kindly (hesed) with Ruth and Orpah (1.8), the field workers to Boaz (2.4), Naomi to Boaz (2.19-20), Boaz to Ruth (3.10) and the women to Naomi (4.14).

v10 This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.

Boaz suggested that other options were open to Ruth. The young men were not kinsman-redeemers and a marriage to one of them would have only benefitted Ruth, not Naomi. She could have chosen to marry for love (poor) or for money (rich), but instead, she chose a marriage of benefit to Naomi's family. This was a greater kindness to Naomi than the other wonderful things she had done for her mother-in-law. The 'younger men' emphasises her selflessness, in that Boaz was older and possibly a lot older, than she was. Ruth placed the purpose of providing an heir to her husband Mahlon and her mother-in-law Naomi on the very highest level of priority.

Yet it wasn't totally selfless. In 2.20 Ruth learned that Boaz was not the only kinsman-redeemer. Ruth did not seek out the other kinsman-redeemer, she wanted Boaz. But if the other one was willing to fulfil his duty as the nearer kinsman-redeemer, then Ruth was selflessly willing to put Naomi's family needs above her own desires.

Abraham, the father of faith, lived before the law had been given. God's nature abounds in hesed (Nehemiah 9.17, Psalm 103.8, Lamentations 3.22, Jonah 4.2). The ultimate expression of God's hesed is Jesus, John 1.12-17 (NKJV):

as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name ... **full of grace ... of His fullness we have all received**, and grace for grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

By faith Ruth took refuge under the wings of God. On that night under the stars, Boaz began his response with words of grace and blessing.