

The romance of redemption (Part 6)

Question to consider:

If the end of the journey were certain, no faith would be needed. But in the face of uncertainty, fear often challenges our faith. What is the connection between waiting on and resting in God, and overcoming fear in our journey of faith?

Ruth 3.11-18 (NIV)

And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning." ¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵ He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town. ¹⁶ When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷ and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" ¹⁸ Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

v11 don't be afraid ... All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character

At the feet of our redeemer, we have nothing to fear. In v1 Naomi expressed confidence in Boaz's character when she risked harm to Ruth in her advice. Here we see it was not misplaced.

The word Boaz uses here is the same as for the woman in Proverbs 31.10. Ruth is the only woman in the Bible for whom this word is used. "All" were aware of the fact that Ruth was a virtuous woman. That would have included the nearer kinsman-redeemer.

v12 there is another who is more closely related

Boaz acts righteously, choosing not to exercise his right as kinsman-redeemer unless this closer kinsman-redeemer relinquished his rights. Even in the middle of the night Boaz did not hesitate to do his duty with regard to Ruth. He made his own personal desires subordinate to the traditional custom, and only when this permitted him to marry Ruth was he ready to do so.

v13 as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning

Boaz put himself under oath with the most solemn, binding oath an Israelite could vow. He promised to resolve the issue the very next day.

"Lie here" Again we miss something important in the translation. There are two Hebrew words that could be used here. One carries sexual connotations and the other does not. In the Hebrew it's clear that there isn't a sexual thing going on here. The verb used removes all ambiguity about implications of sexual relations between the two. They were in a very tempting situation, but chose integrity over passion.

v13-14 if he wants to do his duty ...¹⁴... No one must know that a woman came
We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends, but Boaz did not at that time. He did not know whether Ruth would become his wife or the wife of the nearer goel, and he was careful to protect her reputation, so that there would be nothing to hinder her marriage to the nearer goel if that man chose to claim her as his wife. Not only did nothing occur that was wrong, but Boaz even insisted on no appearance of wrong-doing.

v14 So she lay at his feet until morning
It says she 'lay' not that she slept. Neither of them probably got much sleep after that. Boaz probably lay there strategising how he was going to do what he had committed to. Ruth probably thought about what it would be like to be the wife of the other man, all the while hoping that she would marry Boaz.

v15 six measures of barley...¹⁷ Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed
This was not for Ruth, but for Naomi. Naomi's emptiness (1.21) was being filled by her kinsman-redeemer. They probably talked in those morning hours. Ruth probably told Boaz of Naomi encouraging her to do this thing. With this gift he was showing his appreciation to Naomi, that she had approved of Ruth being his wife.

v15 placed the bundle on her
This probably means that he placed it on top of her head. The Hebrew gives no standard of measurement. Some people think it was ephah, but others disagree because that would weigh 78 kg and would require her and her shawl to be very strong.

v16 "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her
The Hebrew literally says "Who are you?" We can imagine a pause, a sense of anticipation, because Naomi appears to be asking "Are you still Ruth the Moabitess or are you the prospective Mrs. Boaz?" This is the second time in a matter of hours that Ruth was asked the question "Who are you?" Boaz having asked the same question when he awoke at midnight.

Had Boaz been inappropriate with Ruth? Here she holds nothing back from her mother-in-law. But when we examine Naomi's response, there is nothing that denigrates Boaz in any way, as would surely have been the case had there been sexual impropriety.

From v17 Ruth has a passive role in the story. As we saw with Ruth's approach to Boaz, it was normal for the woman to approach the man and make the kinsman-redeemer claim. But from here on Boaz does this, not Ruth. He also dealt with the nearer kinsman, not Ruth. Similarly for us, the work of redemption is entirely God's work.

v18 Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens
Ruth and Naomi had to wait. Naomi's advice to wait clearly indicates that she had taken a stance of faith. It is expressed as a command, the mother attempting to instil confidence in her daughter that the outcome was in God's hand. The events of chapter 1 had been reversed, through Ruth, Naomi had confidence in God. She and Ruth needed to wait on God to work through Boaz.

Try putting yourself in Ruth's situation. The sense of anticipation. She was a doer, someone who took the initiative and acted. Now she had to trust God and wait. So too Naomi, and Boaz. He had a plan and was promptly acting on it, but he had no guarantee that things would go the way he hoped they would. This is the journey of faith. Faith is about who (God), not

what (the outcome). All three had entrusted themselves into God's care. No matter the outcome, Ruth trusted God and was confident that he would do what was best for her in this situation (Romans 8.28). For Ruth and Naomi the waiting involved doing nothing, but for Boaz it involved action, showing that waiting does not necessarily mean inaction.

Boaz was acting out of love, not to earn love. 2 Corinthians 5.14 (NKJV) "*the love of Christ compels us*". We saw this earlier with Ruth working all day and into the night, and not eating her left-over food – why? Because she loved Naomi. Her actions were the result of love. Our redeemer did not hold anything back, because he loved us. For the joy set before him (celebrating the marriage feast) he endured the cross (Hebrews 12.2). We can enter the rest of marriage because the work of redemption is finished (John 19.30). He did it all. Even our faith doesn't save us. Our faith is the means, but it is our redeemer's blood that saves us. Faith enables us to lay hold of the salvation which he purchased for us (Revelation 5.9).

Returning to Naomi's three challenges, it was now certain that Naomi's land would be redeemed, either by Boaz or the other. It was also certain that Ruth would marry and be protected through that marriage, but whom she would marry was not certain. Naomi's line was not necessarily secure, regardless of whom Ruth married, because she had been married to Mahlon for 10 years without having children and so it may be that she could not have children.

Ruth 4.1-8 (NIV)

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. ² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said. ⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." ⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." ⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) ⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

v1 went up to the town gate

The city gate was the place where the city's business was conducted (Genesis 23.10, 18; 2 Kings 7.1; Job 29.7; 2 Samuel 15.2; Lamentations 5.14) and where justice was administered (Deuteronomy 21.19; 22.24; Joshua 20.4; 2 Kings 10.8). In those days a town was surrounded by walls to keep enemy forces out. Remember, this is early in the period of the Judges, when Israel had conquered the land, but when conflict was frequent. Entrance to towns was through special gates. Threshing floors were usually on elevated grounds to take advantage of the wind. In 3.3 "go down to the threshing floor" and here "went up to the town gate", suggests that this gate was high up, presumably to see enemies approaching.

The gate to Bethlehem today:



v1 sat down there just as Boaz went to the city gate to wait for the nearer kinsman-redeemer, because he knew the man would go through this gate. Just as Ruth ‘happened’ to glean in his field, Boaz arrived ‘just as’ the other man came. We make our plans, but God directs our steps (Proverbs 16.9). The nearer kinsman-redeemer is not named. As we see in v7 with the removal of a sandal, there was shame associated with not meeting your obligations as a goel. It is likely that he is not named so that his descendants are not shamed.

Deuteronomy 25.10:

That man’s line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.

v2 Boaz took ten of the elders of the town

Through this public witness of the transaction Boaz ensured that the requirements of the law were met. The fact that those men promptly obeyed Boaz is an indication of his power and influence in the city. Why 10 is not known. In earlier times only 2-3 were needed (Deuteronomy 17.6; 19.15) and in later times 10 was the minimum number (quorum) of resident Jews in a city that was required for the erection of a synagogue.

v3 Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek

Boaz doesn’t just say “Naomi”. He deliberately mentions her return from Moab. Why? Because he is planting a thought, a hook, which he will return to in v6. Four chapters of the book of Numbers are devoted to the hatred the Israelites had toward the Moabites. To the 10th generation the descendants of Moabites were not allowed into the assembly of God. Even friendship with Moabites was condemned (Deuteronomy 23.3-4). It would be like a shiver going through you, or we might imagine the whole crowd saying a collective “Oooo” at the mention of Moab. Having planted this thought, Boaz now skilfully proceeds with the negotiation.

The law stipulated that every 50 years, the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25.28) ancestral land was to be returned to the family owners. In between that time, the land could be leased and the longer the period to the next year of Jubilee, the more valuable the land, because it would be productive for longer. Since Elimelek had no heirs and Naomi was too old to have children, it would remain in the kinsman-redeemer’s family forever. At this stage it appears as though the only obligation would be to provide for the needs of Naomi, who would become a wife of his as a result. The cost to him was low. The land would become part of the inheritance of his children after Naomi’s death. This would make it very attractive for that man to buy the land.

“our relative Elimelek” At Obed’s birth (4.17) the women said “Naomi has a son”, suggesting the brother or cousin relationship to Elimelek. Elimelek, Boaz and the unnamed relative were most likely either brothers or cousins.

v4 and in the presence of the elders of my people ... I will redeem it

Others besides the 10 witnesses had also assembled. There was no TV or social media back then. It was common for the town folk to gather when the elders were in council, to listen in. It is possible that Naomi and Ruth were in the crowd to witness this. If so, along with Boaz

and Naomi, Ruth's heart probably sank on hearing the other man say he will redeem the land. This response seems to be a setback, and the irony of this setback is that it is being caused by righteousness. Boaz rightly gave this man the opportunity to do his duty and this man chose to indeed fulfil his duty. Often when we see obstacles in our path, it is something bad. But here the situation is good men doing their duty. Our frustrations are not only caused by sin but also by ill-timed righteousness.

It is not hard to see that Boaz was handling this situation with masterful skill and discernment. He had no doubt anticipated this answer. Recall the levirate principle Genesis 38.8 (also in Matthew 22.23-28):

Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother."

v5 On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite
Here we see what probably kept Boaz up all night – the strategy he devised. In fact, it's likely that over the past three months he had been day dreaming about marrying Ruth and how that might come to be. Now that it was almost within his reach, he was determined to do all he could to make certain she would marry him and not the other man. We read this like all the rest and miss the intonation, the expression. Remember his purpose. Does he want to sell the redemption idea to the other man? NO! Quite the opposite. He wanted to present the situation in a way that would make it likely that the other man would decline.

We read this as one sentence, but it is likely that he expressed it in a way that emphasised 'the Moabite'. In 3.11 'all' knew her to be a woman of great virtue, but notice that Boaz does not remind the other man of this. Boaz does not say that everyone in town admires her, that she is a hard worker, selfless, dedicated, loyal, caring and a polite woman. No. Those would be the types of things he might have said if he was wanting to sell the other man on the idea. But that was NOT his aim. Boaz did not mention any of those things.

The kinsman-redeemer had to be willing to assume ALL the obligations that went with the redemption. It was all or nothing. There was no in-between. Boaz had started with the most desirable part of the obligation, the redemption of the land. Then he proceeded to make the deal less and less attractive. It meant losing the land, because that would belong to his son by Ruth and would no longer be a part of his inheritance. Regardless of whether she bore a son or not, he would be burdened with the support of another family. By the law of redemption, Ruth, and Naomi, came with the land.

Boaz probably paused before adding "the Moabite" to emphasise this point. Ruth was the wrong race, a Moabitess. It was against the law to marry foreigners from certain nations. Although Moabites are not specifically named, sexual relations with them are condemned, so the implication is that it includes Moabites.

v6 Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate

The increased financial burden inherent in rearing another family was a contributing factor to his decision, together with the probability of losing the property if a son should be born to Ruth. But the stigma of marriage to a foreigner, especially a Moabitess, was the main reason for the man's refusal. He was unwilling to have his family inheritance split between his existing children and the potential offspring of a union with Ruth.

The nearer kinsman-redeemer gave up his right, fearing it would negatively impact upon the inheritance to his offspring. Not only do we not know the name of the man, but his family line and inheritance are buried in oblivion and disgrace. Whereas Boaz's family line was honoured above all the families of Israel. This could have been the outcome for the nearer kinsman-redeemer. Fear robbed him and his descendants of this honour.

Boaz here is so like the heroes of our faith in Hebrews 11, many of whom died before ever seeing the outcome. Boaz's faith was rewarded in the generations which followed – the Davidic line of kings and eventually Jesus. But like the heroes in Hebrews 11, he died before seeing any of that.

v6 You redeem it yourself

The outcome Boaz had worked towards was achieved!

v7-8 for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal ...⁸ ... he removed his sandal

Deuteronomy 25.5-9:

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son ... Her husband's brother shall take her ...⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother ...⁷ However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife ...⁹ his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals.

This giving of his right as the nearer kinsman-redeemer to Boaz, by taking off his sandal and giving it to Boaz in front of witnesses, symbolised that he was giving his right to walk on Naomi's land to Boaz. This was originally seen by Abraham in Genesis 13.17 and was what Joshua was told to do in Joshua 1.3.

As the hem of the garment in the previous session drew our attention again to Boaz as symbolic of Jesus, so too this removal of the sandal. In Exodus 3.5 Moses removed his sandals when in the presence of God, on holy ground (Acts 7.33), and Joshua removed his sandals when before God on holy ground (Joshua 5.13-15).

By law the nearer kinsman-redeemer should have done his duty. The law cannot redeem us, but instead highlights that we need to be redeemed (Rom 3.20). What the law could not do (marry a Moabite), grace could. The nearer relative was not willing to meet the ALL the obligations, but Boaz was. If God can redeem Ruth, a Moabitess, then he can redeem anyone – including you and me.

To redeem during the period of the judges had three meanings: to free from bondage (Leviticus 25.47-48), from poverty (Leviticus 25.25), or from death (in the case of a widow who needed an heir to carry on the family line and provide for her, Deuteronomy 25.5-6).

Our redeemer freed us from bondage, poverty and death!