

Ruth 4:1-17

We continue looking at the family tree of Jesus in our 'Who do you think you are' series. Today we go well back in the Bible sticky pages to Ruth and to Ruth chapter 4.

In case you're not familiar with the story let's remind ourselves what has happened so far. Naomi, her husband Elimelech and their 2 sons had left Israel in a time of famine and gone to Moab. There the boys married two Moabite girls but then Elimelech and the boys died. Naomi returned with Ruth one of her daughters-in-law to Bethlehem. There Ruth met Boaz while out getting food and Boaz in response to Ruth's love for her mother-in-law is very generous to her in providing food. That led to a plan to try and get Boaz to take on the role of kinsman-redeemer and involved Ruth in a risky and risqué piece of opportunism on the threshing floor. But all worked out well and Boaz accepted the offer to marry Ruth and act as kinsman-redeemer. However he knew there was someone who had a prior right to that role. So v1 he was leaning on lamppost at the town gate waiting for this man to come along and Boaz has in mind a cunning plan.

When the man came along v1 Boaz drew him aside with 10 elders of the city who were there to be witnesses. v3&4 Boaz explained the situation or at least part of the situation. Naomi has a piece of land, which presumably was no good to her as she had no sons to work it. Either on her death or to raise money to buy food it might pass out of the possession of the tribe or clan. So it was incumbent upon the nearest relative, if he could, to buy it so that it remained within the clan. That was the role of the kinsman-redeemer. One of the tribe who would maintain the tribe or clan's land. On the surface it looked a good deal. A piece of land would add to the inheritance of this man's children and his standing as a loyal clan member would go up. So the man said O.K.

But then Boaz throws in the little added extra of Ruth v5... This too was often part of the role of the kinsman-redeemer. Normally it would be to marry the widow but in this case because the widow is beyond child bearing age the daughter-in-law in order to have children and continue the line, in this case of Elimelech.

Now that caused a problem for the man. v6... if he should marry Ruth and they should have children it would mean those would be added to the children he already had and the inheritance would be split amongst more children and so his present ones wouldn't get as much. In this new light it wasn't such a good deal. In fact it was too costly. He was prepared to act but when the cost was spelt out it was too high.

Next in this rather odd ritual that looks like a precursor of the freemasons, the man took off his sandal, rolled up his trouser leg and gave Boaz a funny hand shake. Well anyway he handed the matter back to Boaz in front of the witnesses and v10 Boaz stated his intentions...

Boaz took her as his wife and she bore a son, v13 who was a great joy to his Granny Naomi as grandson's tend to be to their granny! They named the son Obed, who as we can see from v17 was the father of Jesse who was the father of David. So we see how Boaz and Ruth fit into the family tree of Jesus.

But what are the lessons for us from Boaz, Ruth and from God?

1. Boaz & Ruth in both we see costly love. With Ruth in Chap 1 we see how when Naomi decided to return to Judah Ruth went with her. It was an act of love that was costly. As Naomi pointed out she couldn't have any more sons for Ruth to marry. She would be a foreigner in another country and there was no man to provide for them. But despite all that Ruth in love sacrificed herself, her own desires and hopes for the sake of Naomi. She was leaving the security of her own land and people to care for a bitter old woman.

We see something of the same with Boaz. We know little of Boaz as to whether he also had children or what but we do see his love. Boaz had a plan to rescue and redeem Naomi and Ruth and he put it into practice despite the cost to himself. We should not underestimate the fact that Boaz was bringing others into his family and that involved cost. However he was willing to do that in love and as Naomi's kinsman-redeemer. So Boaz in love responded to the faithful love of Ruth and despite the cost to his reputation and fortune he married Ruth and paid out for Naomi's land. A further cost was that that Ruth was a Moabitess, a foreigner. Every so often through the book Ruth is referred to as Ruth the Moabitess and I get the feeling that what the narrator is wanting the readers to see is the way in which God draws this foreigner into the body of his people and into salvation history. However for Boaz this was part of the risk and the cost of his love for he put his very reputation at risk by marrying a Moabite woman. In both we see costly love. Love which sacrificed much for others.

Their love of course mirrors the greater love of God in Jesus Christ. Who left the glory of heaven and came to earth. There on earth he paid the price to redeem the world. Through that people of all nations are drawn into the kingdom of God and become children of God. He left his disciples with the challenge to "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12)

Boaz and Ruth point us to Jesus and their costly love challenges us about our love.

Just take a moment to think about some of our relationships. Think about the closest for example with our spouses or our children, grandchildren.

Ask yourself what is my love like? Do I give without counting the number of times I give and without counting the cost?

What about our physical neighbours? Are we willing to show love for them without wanting anything in return? I don't mean huge things but just in small things which do have a cost for us? I was talking with a friend the other day who was telling me that while his neighbours had been away over the summer he'd been asked to water their vegetables, which he'd been happy to do. Just before they'd come back he'd been cutting his grass and looked across the road saw that his neighbours needed doing and so just went across and did it. When the neighbours came back he chatted with them and they gave him some chocolates but didn't notice that the grass had been cut. As he told me it he admitted it rankled a bit with him but he knew it shouldn't. Love doesn't ask for any reward!

Then there are the more fleeting contacts such as people who serve us in shops or we speak to on the phone. It doesn't cost us to be nice and pleasant but actually we can just go the extra mile and take time to speak or chat with people and be pleasant and helpful. We could go on with people at work at church and so on but I hope we are able now or later to take time and look in the mirror of God's word and ask about our love. Are we willing and able to love as Boaz and Ruth did and as Jesus did?

Boaz and Ruth showed costly love.

2. God - believing that God is sovereign we recognise that all that has been going on was not just by accident but by his Sovereign plan. It wasn't luck that took Ruth to Boaz's field despite how 2:3 sounds, "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech." God was involved and God was at work and we can see something of why in the second part of Chapter 4.

In v11 the elders prayed and we need some help in understanding their prayer.

Rachel and Leah were the wives of Jacob or Israel. Leah bore him 6 sons from whom came six of the 12 tribes of Israel and Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin. The implication of the prayer is that they sensed something big was a foot and perhaps Ruth would play a foundational part in the history of God's people as these two women had.

Perhaps today they might pray may the Lord make her like Samantha and Kylie!

Tamar in v12 was a foreigner who through a somewhat scandalous relationship with Judah kept that family line going. The inclusion of her in the prayer gives the idea that through this foreigner Ruth may God keep Elimelech's family going.

Well the prayer, in God's providence, was answered v13 and the women friends of Naomi recognise that this was the action of God. Here through God's providence and the faithful action of the kinsman-redeemer is a child who will renew your life, that is provide an heir and a continuation of the family, and will sustain you in your old age, that is provide the food to keep Naomi. The two problems with which Naomi came to Bethlehem have been answered and as we see Naomi with the child in her lap in v16 we see that God has filled her emptiness.

We all love a happy ending. But in a sense this isn't simply a happy ending. The point of the book is to show this as a link in the chain of salvation history. The book of Ruth stands between the period of the judges, which ended with lawlessness and godlessness where "everyone did as he saw fit", (Judges 21:25) and the time of the Kings when God began to establish his rule over his people. Ruth was to become the great grand mother of King David. God is at work here to move forward his salvation and into that plan he drew this Moabite widow. The bigger picture is there for us in Matt 1.5&16. Ruth's part in salvation history is seen and along with her of course Boaz. Ruth would not have seen herself as special far from it she simply had the capacity to love and that was used by God to his own ends and purposes.

Just for a moment have a look at yourself. How do you view yourself? Let me suggest a few people and see who you identify with. Abraham, Ruth, the Apostle Paul, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham, Richard Turnbull. You may say I don't identify with any of these I'm just an ordinary Christian. I'm not a great theologian, preacher, person of faith, person of action. I'm just ordinary. Fine but that includes you and I in the purposes of God because this account is of ordinary people. Others may say I don't identify with these people because well I'm pretty new as a Christian. I don't know all the jargon and stuff and often I feel an outsider. Fine because this account is of an outsider, a foreigner who wasn't fully part of the people of God and yet was drawn into the people and into the work of God and not just on the edge of those purposes but at the centre. So it can be for us.

You know how it is in the family you are unpacking the luggage from the car and Dad picks up the heavy suitcases, Mum gathers in all the towels, one of the older children picks up a large bag of food and the small child is given the buckets and spades to carry, something light something suitable. We might think well being just an ordinary Christian in the purposes of God all I can be involved in is something light something simple. But this story suggests otherwise. Ruth was drawn by God into the centre of his purposes and used by God to forward his salvation work not because she had great faith or knowledge or gifts but simply because of her ability to love, to love sacrificially. She had no idea that her love for Naomi and her love for Boaz would result in a place in history and in one sense we could say that it was a small things she did and yet God took those small acts and used them for his mighty purposes. So where does it leave us? I think it speaks encouragement to all of us not to see any act of love as of unimportance because God can use it in his eternal purposes.

The book of Ruth is about God working out his purposes in the short term to maintain the family name of Elimelech but in the longer term to raise a King who would put God at the centre of his people and in the eternal terms to establish a saviour not just for the people of God but for all people. God worked through these two quite ordinary people who showed deep and costly love. They would have had no idea of their part in the history of God's people. We need the perspective of history to show us that but they simply reflected in their lives the love of God.