

## God's Tender Redemption: In Loving kindness and Fullness

What makes for a really good story?

Whether it's a good book or a good movie – why do some stories really seem to work and others just seem to fall flat? In movies, sometimes we think it's the actors who make the story... but even the best actors have at least one movie that no one wants to watch – at least not a second time.

There are things we typically like – happy endings, justice for the bad guys, & the good guys getting all the rewards. Maybe you like stories that are suspenseful or unpredictable. Maybe you like stories that make you laugh or make them think. Maybe you like stories where the main character is so smart or strong that they can single handedly outwit all of the bad guys. Some people like stories that they can relate to or true stories about people who really lived. There are a lot of reasons why we like certain movies, certain books.

Different elements of storytelling appeal to different people, but most people like stories that end well, that pull on our heart strings; where someone we can relate to is saved out of a really bad situation.

The book of Ruth has a lot of the elements. We can relate to it because we feel many of the same emotions, it has a hero that rescues the main characters out of darkness; and best of all, it's true.

The book of Ruth and especially these last 2 chapters are all about how God redeems His people by His sovereign hand. God works out redemption by His sovereign hand. Redemption does not come about because of our efforts, but because of His efforts, His initiative, His forgiveness, and His provision. It is God who captures our hearts and transforms us into His children. God is the author and perfecter of our faith. The main point of our passage today is that God works out redemption by His sovereign hand.

Let's briefly review what we talked about last week. The story of Ruth takes place during the days when the judges ruled. There was no king and, according to the last verse in the book of Judges, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The nation of Israel did not have a unified leader and the disobedience of the people resulted in rampant idol worship and unrest. This was a dark time in Israel's history. Then we talked about the country of Moab. Moab was a bad place. They had a reputation for idol worship and for their young women luring the Israelite men to worship false gods and sacrifice in their temples. Moab and Moabites were culturally despised by Israel. Moab was a land of cursing.

So, you've got Elimelech and his wife Naomi. They go to Moab because there was famine in the land of Israel. While they are there, Elimelech dies. Their sons marry Moabite women and then later proceed to die. A total of 10 years pass and Naomi decides to go back to Bethlehem, where she had come from. Her one daughter-in-law leaves her and goes back to her family in Moab. The other daughter-in-law, Ruth, says the following words to her in Ruth 1:16 – 17, "Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." We talked about how these are the loving words of a covenant promise that Ruth makes to Naomi. We talked about how this is surprising coming from a Moabite woman. They return to Bethlehem and Naomi tells the women of the town to call her Mara, which means "Bitter" instead of calling her Naomi, which means, "pleasant," because the hand of the Lord has gone out against her.

Ruth then gleanes in the field of one of their redeemers, Boaz. She gathers grain and through this, Boaz provides her with protection and food and pronounces blessing upon her. She stays and continues working through both barley and wheat harvest. Throughout this time, Ruth remains with Naomi. Throughout those first two chapters, we see how God uses Ruth as a mediator for Naomi to receive God's provision and His blessing.

Now, approximately two weeks has passed as we move from the end of chapter 2 to the beginning of chapter 3. The two widows have made for themselves a modest existence. The harvest was now over and Ruth had gathered much grain from the fields. Each day Ruth continued to work and each day, undoubtedly, more and more, Naomi would appreciate and be amazed by the love that Ruth showed her.

Naomi then lovingly turns to Ruth with an idea, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?" Naomi no longer calls her "daughter-in-law, but instead she tenderly calls her, "daughter." Ruth has done so much to care and comfort Naomi that now, Naomi seeks after Ruth's welfare.

Naomi points out that Boaz is their relative and then proposes that Ruth should go and wash, anoint herself with oil, and take on her cloak to meet Boaz on the threshing floor. She then lays out the details of approaching Boaz. Wait until he has finished eating and drinking and then observe where he is lies down. She then tells Ruth to quietly go, uncover his feet, and lie down – Boaz will then tell Ruth what to do.

Okay, back up for a moment. What is Naomi proposing? Well, most likely up to this point, the only time Boaz has seen Ruth has been when she has been working in the fields. She would have been dirty and sweaty and, there is a good chance that she has been in the clothes of someone in mourning. The last verse of chapter 1 pointed out that Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. It was now the time of threshing, so there is a good chance that they have been in town for less than month. With that being the case, Ruth may still be in a time of grieving over her dead husband, which she would have displayed by her clothing. Now Naomi grants her permission and encourages her clean up to go see Boaz. Ruth replies, “All that you say I will do,” and went down to the threshing floor and did what Naomi had commanded her to do.

The threshing floor was outside of the town and there is a good chance that it was near the harvesting field. An ideal threshing floor would have consisted of stone or very ground on the crest of a hill. To get the grain off of the husk – the grain, husk, and straw would be beaten to loosen the husk and then thrown up in the air with a winnowing fork. The heavy grain would fall to the ground and the chaff would blow away in the breeze. The hard ground would then allow the thresher to easily gather the grain. The threshing would often be done in the evening when there would be a breeze to carry away the chaff and it would not be uncommon for the thresher to stay all night with the grain to guard and protect it from wild animals and thieves. What is interesting is that prostitutes would often take advantage of the threshing time to go out at night and visit the men in the field. Hold that thought...

So, Ruth goes out to the threshing floor and does as Naomi has commanded her to do – she waits until Boaz has eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, she sees where he lies down at the end of the heap of grain, and then when he is asleep, she goes to him and uncovers his feet.

It appears as though things are set up for a moral disaster. Here is a young Moabite woman, leaned and perfumed, going out to see a man who has worked all day and then eaten and drank until his heart is merry. The young Moabite woman comes softly, takes the corner of his covering and moves it up and over, exposing his bare feet. The smell of her perfume in the air, she lies down at his feet.

The author seems to be leading us into a highly provocative scene – even the working used is highly suggestive.

At midnight, the man was startled. When he rolls over, he finds a woman lying at his feet. The words come to his mouth, “Who are you?” and Ruth answers, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”

What we are seeing here is not a scene of seduction or sensuality. In fact, it is far from it. The author uses suggestive language and then shows us a greater love, a deeper kindness, and instead of sin we see redemption displayed through kindness.

There is a word that the English translations convey as “kindness” which in Hebrew is pronounced Heseb. This word is only used 3 times in the book of Ruth, but entire book is a wonderful illustration of the concept of Heseb. The word carries more weight to it than just “kindness.” It also carries a sense of “loyal love, goodness, and faithfulness.” It is often referred to as “loving-kindness.”

It is the kindness that Ruth showed when she committed her entire life to Naomi. It is the kindness that Ruth showed when she faithfully worked in the field day by day to provide for the two of them. It is the same loving-kindness that Boaz displayed when he recognized Ruth’s sacrifice and commitment and then granted her so much privilege in his field – including telling his reapers to drop some of the grain that they had collected for Ruth to pick up, and providing protection for her in his field. This is the loving-kindness that moves beyond the commands of the law to obey the spirit of the law. Boaz was more generous than the law required him to be. The law said that he had to allow the widow to glean from his field, but he did not have to protect her and provide additional for her. Ruth was not required at all to stay with Naomi, but she showed Naomi loving-kindness by committing to stay with her and then honoring her vow without a hint of regret. This type of loving-kindness displays integrity of character, of selflessness, and obedience that reflects God’s character. God’s redemption is clearly displayed through these acts of loving kindness.

Ruth has not suggested that Boaz share his blanket with her in the cold night air, some translations read, “Spread the corner of your garment over me.” She is not asking Boaz to share his bed that night. In fact, Ruth is not suggesting impropriety at all. Ruth has suggested that Boaz spread his wings of protection and provision over her as a redeemer.

Last week we briefly mentioned that a redeemer would be able to buy back any land that was sold or leased outside of the family. In all likelihood, Elimelech had sold or leased the land before leaving for Moab in chapter 1. The land could only be redeemed, or bought back, by one of the family’s redeemers. If Elimelech or Ruth’s husband were alive, they could redeem it, but the widows themselves did not have the rights. The redeemer would buy back the land to protect the deceased family’s inheritance. In other words, a rich foreigner could not come in and buy up all the land of Israel and kick them out; or one of tribe of Israel could not buy off the land of another tribe. The law would only allow for the land to be sold for a time - and then the redeemer would then have the right to buy it back.

But Ruth is not really speaking of the land he might gain, but of the protection and provision that Boaz can offer to her as the widow of the deceased. Look at the similarity in the working of chapter 3 verse 9 and the blessing that Boaz pronounces on Ruth in chapter 2 verse 12, “The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” In chapter 2, Boaz prayed that she would receive reward and protection from God, under whom she had taken refuge. Now, in chapter 3, Ruth is suggesting that the same wing of protection be given through Boaz.

This is what Boaz understood as well, look at his reaction in verse 10, “And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.” The first kindness, this *Hesed*, is greater than the first. The first kindness that Ruth showed was her unflinching commitment to Naomi, to leave her father and mother and her home to commit fully to Naomi and to God. Ruth put Naomi’s life before her own. Ruth gave up whatever plans, whatever hopes and dreams she might have had to stay with Naomi and care for her.

Through the words that Boaz speaks, we see the fullness of Ruth’s second kindness, her greater *Hesed*. She is now proposing that Boaz should marry her for the sake of redeeming her late husband’s inheritance. This redeemer would take on the care of Ruth and Naomi as well as the inheritance of the land. Ruth has shown that she is even willing to enter into an arranged marriage for the benefit of others – namely Naomi and her late husband.

Boaz points out that she has not gone after young men, whether rich or poor – Ruth has not left Naomi to marry for love or money. She did not act like you would expect a young Moabite woman to act. This is true sacrifice, this is true *Hesed*. Do you see how God’s redemption of us is shown through Ruth’s acts of loving-kindness? Boaz quickly accepts, “And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask.”

It’s so amazing that maybe less than a month prior, Ruth would have only been seen as a Moabite woman, not to be trusted, less than a servant in the field. Now Boaz calls her his equal, “I will do for you all that you ask,” and he says that the entire town knows that she is a worthy woman. Ruth’s actions were a witness to everyone who saw her. God’s character and loving-kindness were on display through this young woman. God has not overlooked the faithfulness.

It’s at this point in almost every conversation I’ve had about Ruth that someone says, “Ruth *must* have been beautiful.” The text says that she could have gone after other young men, Boaz does so much for her, and now he seems really eager to marry her. Well, Ruth is beautiful. She displays the type of beauty that I want my daughters to display, the same beauty that I quickly recognized in my wife, the same beauty that all believing women should work hard to maintain. Ruth is beautiful and her beauty comes from within, from her character. Boaz says that, “all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.” The phrase “worthy woman” or “woman of noble character” is also used in Proverbs 12:4, where it says, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,” and in Proverbs 31:10, “An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her and it goes on through the end of that chapter. The author tells us nothing of Ruth’s physical appearance, but he does tell us that she is beautiful.

Now Boaz explains that there is one last problem. He is a redeemer, but not THE redeemer. There is a redeemer that is closer than he is and he commits that he will clear the matter up in the morning. Boaz is eager to marry Ruth, but he also trusts in God’s law and God’s hand working in the situation. If the other redeemer will redeem Ruth, good, but if he is unwilling, Boaz will redeem her.

Before the breaking of the dawn, Ruth arose to leave before anyone could recognize her and Boaz agrees that no one should see her. If anyone were to see Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor at night or in the morning, they would think that more than just an intimate conversation had taken place. But Boaz does not let her leave empty. He instructs her to hold out her garment and pours out six measures of barley and sends her home.

When she arrives home, Naomi asks her, “How did you fare, my daughter?” once again she addresses her as daughter. Ruth told Naomi all that had happened and showed her the grain and conveys his words, “You must not go home empty handed to your mother-in-law.” Naomi had returned to Bethlehem empty, but Ruth does not return from Boaz empty. Naomi and Ruth now wait, knowing that the matter will be settled that day.

How is God’s redemption displayed through these acts of loving-kindness?

With the same tender and gentle loving kindness that Ruth showed Naomi in committing her life to her, even in her bitterness; With the same loving kindness that Boaz now shows to Ruth as calls her a worthy woman and consents to marry her, even though she is a Moabite; With this same loving kindness, we see how God tenderly calls us out of our own sins and pays the price of our redemption through the blood of His son. God’s redemption is clearly displayed through acts of loving kindness.

When Jesus healed the sick and caused the blind to see, he gave the people a picture of what full redemption would be like, when there is no more sickness or pain. When we read about Ruth’s example of loving-kindness, of *Hesed*, we see a picture of what true redemption looks like – when there will be no more sin or death.

When we show the same type of loving-kindness in our own lives, we minister Christ to the believer and unbeliever alike. When we live our lives for the benefit of others, we reflect the one who gave His life for us.

Let's continue to chapter 4 as we continue to see how God works out the redemption.

Just as Boaz had promised, it was the next morning. He goes down to the gate of the city and sits down. The city gate is where people will enter and exit the city to work in the fields. It also serves as the courthouse and town hall, so the act of Boaz sitting down at the gate is a signal that he is conducting official business. "And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by." Boaz might have known the time that the man usually went out to the field or not, but the author is pointing out that this is not a coincidence. God had sent the man.

Now, here is the irony – the author does not give the redeemer's name. Most of the English translations have Boaz call him, "friend." "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." But we're not exactly sure how to translate it, a possible translation might be, "Turn aside, Mr. So and So; sit down here." We will see the irony in a moment, but for the time being, it's enough to know that the author does not ever tell us his name.

Boaz gets 10 elders of the city and now official business can begin. "Then he said to the redeemer, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.'"

Boaz told Ruth that he would bring a resolution that day and so he brings the opportunity of redemption up to THE redeemer and gives him first opportunity to buy. Boaz tells him that if he wants it, he should take it; otherwise Boaz will redeem the land. Mr. So and So responds that he will redeem it. By now, there is a crowd building around the gate, watching the proceedings. Imagine what Ruth would have thought at that moment if she had been in that crowd of people.

When THE redeemer says that he will redeem the land, Boaz brings out the missing piece of information. "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."

Now, this was not strictly true according to Levitical law concerning the redemption of the land. If a man died, his younger brother would take the widow as his wife. The original reader would be most familiar with the example this type of situation in the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. When Tamar's husband died, Judah commanded his younger son to become her wife, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." This younger brother refused and so God took his life. Well, eventually, she bore a son named Perez.

Here is another example of Boaz showing loving-kindness toward Ruth. Ruth's late husband had no surviving brother, so technically there was no longer any obligation to her, but Boaz goes beyond the law to show her this compassion. "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth *the Moabite*, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." THE redeemer needed to make a decision. It would have been possible for him to redeem the land and say, "Forget about Ruth and Naomi," but it seems that the way Boaz presented him the situation; he didn't really leave him that option.

Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Now, why did he choose NOT to redeem the land or Ruth?

He did not want to impair his own inheritance. He wanted to protect his name, maybe from being attached to a Moabite woman, maybe he was afraid that if he married Ruth and she only bore him one son, then both Elimelech AND his inheritance would stay in Elimelech's family. Whatever the reason, it is THOUSANDS of years later and we know the names of Ruth and Boaz, but we're calling this guy, "Mr. So&So." This man wanted so badly to protect his inheritance but now that inheritance is long forgotten, and we are still speaking of the loving-kindness that Boaz and Ruth.

At this point, THE redeemer removes his sandal and hands it to Boaz to show that he is forfeiting his right to be the first redeemer and with his response, we hear no more of Mr. So and so.

Boaz gives the official summary for the court record, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."

All the people who were gathered at the gate, along with the elders said, “We are witnesses!”

And they pronounce their blessing on the union, “May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

In the blessing, they ask that God would give them children and that they would be honorable and renowned and they compare the couple to Judah and Tamar and the house of Perez, from whom the promised Messiah would come from. Boaz marries Ruth. Verse 13, “So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son.”

Now we see the full completion of how God worked through Ruth to bless Naomi.

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed.

Naomi had been empty, but now she is full. She had nothing and now she has a daughter-in-law who has, through her love, proved to be worth more than seven sons. Ruth committed to her when they had nothing and she faithfully loved her and sacrificed for her at every step of the way. Now – in such a short amount of time, Naomi holds her grandbaby.

The truly amazing part of the story comes with the very last part of verse 17 and the genealogy that following, “They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.” God brought about all these things not just to redeem Naomi, not just to redeem Ruth, but to redeem all of Israel. God would use the great grandson of this baby, Ruth’s child, to unite the people of God and bring them under his promised King, King David.

God used Ruth to call Naomi back to Himself – God used Ruth to redeem Naomi. God uses Ruth to redeem His people from out of the dark days of the Judges to the united kingdom of David. And on this side of the cross, we know that God uses Jesus Christ, who was a descendent of David, a descendent of Ruth, to bring forth to bring us out of darkness, out of bitterness, to redeem all the people of God. God works out redemption by his sovereign hand and HIS redemption, God’s redemption is brought forth ultimately through Jesus Christ.

There is hope in the midst of any sorrow. Paul Tripp writes:

“One wonderful thing about the story of redemption is that God has let us in on the ending. We know that death – and all the suffering and grief that accompany it – will die. There is glorious life after death when God will dry your last tear and you will never have a reason to cry again. The light of God’s eternal glory will flood your life. You will never face death again.

Your tears now are not only tears of grief; they are also tears of longing. All of us experience this longing when we are cast into the darkness of death. We long for a better place where life doesn’t end this way. The Bible gloriously reassures us that our longing is not in vain. The story that began in an eternity without death will end the same way. Because you know how the story is going to turn out, your grief can be tempered by hope. You can grieve with one eye on your present loss and one eye on your future. Yes, you still miss your loved ones greatly. You feel the stinging pain of loss. But your pain does not have to give way to discouragement, depression, and desperation. Even this moment of pain can be colored by your hope.”

Our Hope is in Jesus, in Christ alone. God’s redemption is brought forth ultimately through Jesus Christ.

The book of Ruth is a good story – it touches our heart, it inspires us to love one another better, it challenges us to trust more deeply in God’s goodness and His provision. It reminds us that our eyes need to be looking forward. When we are stuck in our bitterness, our anger, our grief and sorrows, our laziness, our selfishness, and our addictions; when we are stuck, we need remember to place our hope in the ultimate redeemer – the one who has come in the form of a helpless baby, lived a sinless life, and died a horrible death on the cross, so that we could be redeemed. Remember that he has not abandoned us and he will come again soon to take us home.

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