

Ruth 4

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[0 : 00] Before we turn to our final study in the book of Ruth, let me just say how much I've enjoyed being with you over this time of communion. It's been a great pleasure to be reacquainted with this congregation and to meet old friends and make new ones, and I do trust that God will continue to bless you in the work of the gospel here in this city.

Well, we come this evening to the end of a great story in the Old Testament. We've been working through the book of Ruth, and we've been trying to emphasize some of the great doctrines that are brought before us in this book in which the gospel in all its glory is set before us in the narrative of a young woman from the land of Moab who came into the inheritance of the people of God.

The way in which that happened was quite remarkable. God had sent a famine to his own people in the land of promise, in the land that he had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants. There was a famine. God had often said that he would use a famine to speak loudly to his people, to call them to repentance from their sins and to return to himself. Instead of doing so, this particular family, probably like many others, left Bethlehem in search of food in Moab. Food wasn't actually the problem.

Their relationship with God was the problem, and instead of listening to God's summons, repentance and reformation and renewal, they went off to a place where God had said you shouldn't mingle with the people there. And there they went, and their journey brought them into the land of death.

But in Moab, God did something quite remarkable. God touched the life of Ruth, and she returned with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. And we have seen her arrive in Bethlehem, and we've seen her glean in the fields belonging to Boaz, who is called in this book her kinsman redeemer, which simply means, first of all, that he was related to her, and because he was related to her and to her late husband, he had an obligation to continue the family line and to protect and preserve the family name. In chapter 3, Ruth went to her redeemer, to Boaz, to leave the matter with him, and he promised that he would sort it out. That's the point at which we take up the narrative this evening, as we move into the last movements of the book of Ruth. And really, we have three endings in chapter 4 of Ruth. We've got the end of Ruth's story, and we've got the end of Naomi's story, but we also have the end of God's story in this remarkable history. So what is the end of the story for Ruth? Well, we left Ruth encouraged by the words of her mother-in-law to her that Boaz would not rest until he settled the matter. Well, what was the matter that he was going to settle? It was the matter of finding a place of rest and security for Ruth. It's what she needed then, and it's what we need now. And only someone who could perform all the duties of a redeemer could secure rest for Ruth. He promised he would do so, but he did alert her to the fact that there was someone, he is not named in this narrative, who was more closely related to the family, and the first primary obligation was on him. So now we read in chapter 4 that Boaz wants to settle this issue too, and he goes to the gate of the city, to the place of judgment, to the parliament of Bethlehem, and he gathers the elders together and brings this man who is more closely related to the family and says to them, Naomi has come back. She has a piece of land that must be secured and redeemed. You're the one who's closest in relation, and if you will redeem it, then do so. Give them security. Buy the land. Pay what's necessary and buy the land. The man says, yes, I'll do it.

[4 : 49] I'll do it. Well, then Boaz reminds him of what God's law also said. If you do that, you must also marry Ruth the Moabitess, the man's widow, and you will then maintain the name of the dead with his property. Well, at that, the man who is more closely related balks and says, well, I can't do that. I'm not prepared to do that. So he transfers the right of redemption to Boaz, and Boaz then makes this announcement. Before all the elders and the people, you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech. I've taken it over. I've paid the purchase price. It now belongs to me. I'm going to look after it. I'm going to be answerable for it, and it's mine. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Malon's widow, as my wife to maintain the name of the dead with his property.

It's not just the land that's mine. The lady is mine too. You are my witnesses. And all the elders of the city say, yes, we are witnesses. May the Lord bless her. May he make your home great and establish it. May your home be like that of Rachel and Leah who built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem? So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. That's the end of her story in this remarkable book. It's one of the loveliest stories ever told, and it's one of the most delightful narratives on the pages of the Bible. How this young woman from Moab, who ordinarily and naturally by nature and by birth and by derivation, had absolutely no right and no claim to belong to the people of God, nonetheless becomes a member of the covenant community because she is married to Boaz.

But this is not just an Old Testament love story. It's no less than that. But it's much more than that. The marriage with which the book of Ruth comes to a great conclusion is representative of a theme that runs right through Scripture from beginning to end.

There's a sense indeed in which the Bible both begins and ends with a marriage. We're told that when God created the world, He made everything good. There wasn't a blemish in anything that He had made. He saw what He had made. He looked at it with satisfaction and delight. It was all good. He created man in His own image, fashioned him from the dust of the earth, shaped a body out of the dust, and breathed into that body, and man became a living soul. That's why you are what you are, a psychosomatic unity, body and soul, one entity, part of you shaped from the dust, part of you enlivened and animated from heaven. And as body and soul, you are a person with dignity and value before God. And God looked at man, and God said, it's very good. There was only one thing that wasn't good.

God said, it is not good that the man should be alone. And so He makes another creation.

[8 : 46] From Adam's body, He creates Eve. He presents her with, He presents him with a wife, and establishes an ordinance of marriage for the good of man, and for the good of the whole creation, and for the good of society.

And that theme at the beginning of Genesis is echoed at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation. Revelation. In the book of Revelation, we see Jesus, who is described elsewhere in the New Testament as the last Adam, with His own bride. We see Jesus in the glory of heaven as the Lamb in the midst of the throne. And this most remarkable thing is described for us in the book of Revelation. There is a marriage supper of this Lamb. Who on earth will marry a Lamb? Well, what's interesting is that a city marries a Lamb in the book of Revelation. You cannot take Revelation too literally or try to make too literalistic a picture of it in your mind. But in the book of Revelation, a city gets married to a Lamb.

I saw the city, holy Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, having the glory of God. This is the church that Jesus has secured by His blood and redeemed by His great transaction on the cross. And now at last she is presented to Him, the Lamb of God, and the church is the bride of the Lamb, and the people of God together make up the bride that belongs to this last Adam, this second man, this great glorious Savior. So running right through the Bible is this great theme of the importance of marriage. But it's not just about how important marriage is. It's all about God's great purpose in salvation. Do you remember what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5 when he talks about marriage and the duties and obligations that come with marriage? He says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. And that's the pattern for every husband to love his wife and for every wife to be subject to her husband. This is a great mystery, Paul says, but I am speaking about Christ and the church. Marriage in its very essence is about Christ and the church and the union between the two, and the glorious fact that whom God joins together no one can put asunder. And you know, as you read through the Old Testament, there are some very interesting marriages highlighted. The longest single narrative in the book of Genesis is the narrative of a marriage. Do you remember when

Isaac sent, when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac? And we have that long story in Genesis 24 of how God guided the steps of the servant until He came to Rebekah and He said to her, will you go with this man? And we're told that the son of Abraham received this bride, and they became one, and through her union with Abraham's son, she enters into the glories of God's covenant family, and God's covenant promises to Abraham. Do you see it's an illustration of the very thing that's happening in the gospel tonight, when the gospel goes out into the world, and men and women hear the claims of Christ. Abraham's son is seeking a bride, and the gospel comes and says to you tonight, and to me tonight, will you go with Abraham's son? Will you go with this man? Will you go with Jesus

Christ? Will you take him in all that he is and be united to him, so that through your union with him, you can enter into the fullness of the blessing of the covenant promise of the gospel?

[13 : 04] The same thing is illustrated, I think, in the song of Solomon, in that great celebration of marriage written by David's son, as he thinks about the woman who has entered into her household. She doesn't belong to the covenant community. She doesn't belong to the daughters of Jerusalem. She's a stranger among them, but she loves the king, and she's been brought into a marriage union with the king, and because of that, because of her union with the son of David, she enters into all the covenant blessings that God made and promised to David. And now in Jesus Christ, it is possible for me to enter into that same covenant blessing and to know the fullness of salvation, because all these great promises are mine through marriage union to the son of Abraham and to the son of David. And it's illustrated here too, as Boaz takes Ruth into his home, and as the Moabitess is now brought formally and finally into union with a son of the covenant, she who was alienated, and who was far away, and who was without

God, and who was without hope, she has been brought near, so near that all the blessings of the covenant belonged to her, simply because of her union with her Redeemer. Do you see, my friend, tonight, this is the very heart of the gospel. This is the language Paul uses of us in Ephesians chapter 2. We were far away from God. We had no claim on God. We didn't belong to the covenant family or to the covenant community, but God has brought us in. He's brought us near. He's taken us into such close proximity with Himself that through our marriage union with a great Redeemer, we have become heirs of His salvation. I know tonight that there are many people seeking happiness down different roads and in different things and through different religions and different things that they are trying. And, you know, it's a bit like this man who is named in this chapter as a close relative who promises to do everything necessary but who can't deliver on His promise. Do you see tonight that's what the world is like.

That's the rhetoric of this world. You can have everything in it and the world will promise that it will satisfy and fill your soul, but it cannot deliver on its promise. It's as if the world is saying, I cannot redeem. I cannot redeem. I cannot redeem. But tonight there is someone who can.

Tonight there is a son who can bring you into union with himself and in that union you become an heir of God.

But isn't that the end of Ruth's story? She's been called the Moabitess. Her alienation is emphasized again and again and again throughout this book. But not any more. Not once she becomes the wife of Boaz.

[17 : 02] He took Ruth and she became his wife. That's how she's identified now. Not as a daughter of Moab, but as the bride of the Redeemer. And that past is covered and it's gone and there is a new beginning for her. All things are passed away and all things have become new because she is one with her Redeemer.

She who was alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and a stranger to the covenants of promise, she is now an heiress of God and a joint heir with Boaz of all the blessings that God ever indicated he would give to his covenant community as if she had never come from Moab at all.

So, what does it mean to be a Christian? To be a Christian isn't simply a matter of having special experiences, getting something into us that will make us feel nice and warm and fuzzy inside.

Being a Christian doesn't mean seeing lights on the road and getting some kind of emotional high inside. Being a Christian doesn't mean getting something into us.

Being a Christian means us getting into someone. I want you to grasp that single most important fact tonight.

[18 : 52] Here I am, with all my blemishes and all the stains of a sinful life. Moab is written all over me.

And I'm barred from heaven and the covenant community. I don't belong. And I can't come in. Here I am with my past, with my history, with my conscience, accusing me.

You know that feeling. That guilt feeling. The things that you know you've done wrong, not to speak about the things that you've forgotten, but still are able to awaken your conscience.

I'm not in the business of troubling consciences. You're able to do that on your own. You don't need the church to trouble your conscience or to awaken your conscience.

It's constantly telling you that as you are and in the way that you are and with the nature that you have, you cannot, cannot, cannot get into heaven and know peace in your heart and in your life.

[19 : 59] So here I am. Nothing I can do, nothing I can bring, that can enable me to enter into the blessing of the covenant community. Ah, but do you see tonight?

There is Jesus. He's been set apart by God to be our Redeemer. He's done everything necessary for the redemption and the security of my soul, for the pardon of my sins, the cleansing of my life, the quietening of my conscience, to give me peace in life and hope in death, and the security of knowing that were I to die now, I would go immediately into the presence of God.

That's why He came. That's why He came. And He came and He died at Calvary, and He rose again with triumph and power and glory, and in everything that He is, there is salvation for me.

And it's not a case tonight of me getting Him into my heart. It's a case of me getting into Him. Isn't that the language of the New Testament?

If a man or a woman or a boy or a girl is in Christ Jesus, then everything is new. It's in Him we have forgiveness.

[21 : 21] It's in Him we have justification. It's in Him we have pardon. It's in Him we have acceptance with God. My single most important consideration tonight must be, am I in Christ?

Because if I am, if I am united in a marriage union between myself and my great Redeemer, then whom God joins together, no one in all creation dare put asunder.

It's one of the glories of this great gospel that I can be out of Him one moment and in Him the next, but I cannot be in Him one moment and out of Him the next.

If I'm in Him, if I'm united to Him, if I'm joined to Him, if we are one, then we are one forever. My dear friend tonight, with all the blemishes of your life and all the stains on your history and all the trouble in your conscience and all the sins that witness against you tonight, I commend Jesus to you and I say to you, will you go with this man?

This great Savior, this man of sorrows, this man of Calvary, this man of Golgotha, this man of Gethsemane, this man of the empty grave, this man who has ascended to the right hand of the majesty on high.

[22 : 51] Will you go with this man tonight? And if not, why not? Tell me, tell me, tell me what could possibly be better than going with this man.

Give me another Redeemer who will do everything that needs to be done. Plenty who are saying tonight, yes, I'll redeem, I'll redeem, I'll redeem, but are unable to deliver on the promise.

I tell you tonight, if you come to Jesus Christ, you will find that He not only can deliver on His promise, but will deliver on His promise to redeem your life so that you will not go down into hell.

Will you go with this man? Whatever your past, whatever you were in Moab, is all gone because of a marriage union with the Redeemer.

That's the end of Ruth's story. Well, not quite. The Lord, we are told, enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

[24 : 17] And then something very interesting happens in the narrative. The woman said to Naomi, Now, that ought to ring a bell because when Naomi returned from Moab in chapter 1, the woman said, Can this be Naomi?

And Naomi said, Don't call me Naomi. Don't call me pleasant. Call me Mara. Call me bitter. The Lord has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me again back empty.

But she's not empty now. Now the woman look at her and say, Praise be to the Lord who this day has not left you without a kinsman.

And in verse 17, the woman said, Naomi has a son. Isn't that beautiful? Now in Bethlehem, she's doing something she never did in Moab.

She saw her two sons married in Moab. But she never nursed a child there. But now God has brought her back and God has restored her life.

[25 : 40] And as she holds Ruth's child in her arms, what the woman sing is not a child is born to Ruth, but a child is born to Naomi.

Naomi has a son. And suddenly I realized that the story is as much about her as about her daughter-in-law, Ruth. She had gone off to Moab, backsliding with so many of God's people and drifting away from God.

But look now, God has brought her so much back and restored her to such an extent that now she cradles in her arms. The symbol of hope for the future.

And God has done great things for her and has made her glad. God does that. He does that for His people.

All these wasted years, all these wasted days in Moab that left Naomi filled with so many regrets, wishing so often she had never taken these steps away from Bethlehem at all.

[27 : 04] wondering what on earth possessed them to go down that long, weary road. But these years, to use the language of the prophet Joel, these years that the locusts ate, God has given her back.

All these wasted days, God has now restored to her. And she nurses the son of Ruth in her own arms, took the child, laid him in her lap, and cared for him with a heart full of gladness and thankfulness and love to the sovereign God of His people who never lets them go, no matter how far they drift away, and no matter how many days and years they waste.

Oh, my Christian friend tonight, how many of us have to hang our heads in shame at our own backslidings and our own distancings from God and our own days and weeks and months and years when we weren't where we ought to have been and we weren't doing what we ought to have been doing and instead of serving the Lord and making it plain to everyone that He was our King, we were living as if He wasn't.

What then? Does God wash His hands of us? Not at all. He says of us as He said through the prophet Hosea, how can I give you up?

How can I give you up? He looks at me tonight with all my backslidings and He says, how can I give you up? That's not to give me any excuse.

[29 : 05] But it is to show me the glory of His absolute faithfulness to His covenant promise and tonight I say with the psalmist I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, of His faithfulness, of His commitment, of His covenant love and faithfulness.

That's my reason for thanksgiving tonight. That's my reason for confidence tonight. That's my reason to go on tonight. Not to look to the things that are past, but forgetting the things that are past, to press forward to the things that are before and to keep going on with my eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of my faith, who is able to give me back much more than sin ever took away.

Maybe there are some of you in here tonight who discovered long ago that Jesus was a great Redeemer and prayed to Him and perhaps even trusted in Him, but no one would ever know it now.

and all these years have gone by and you're not where you ought to be. My friend, I give you Jesus all over again.

He is able to place in your arms a hope for the future, whatever has been the hopelessness of your past.

[30 : 49] And you come to Him all over again. And you look away to Him all over again. Let Him be the restorer and the renewer of your life.

And from this moment on, let Him be your God and your guide. That's the end of Naomi's story.

But it's not the end of the book. It's not the end of God's story in the book of Ruth. They named him Obed.

He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. And then the book of Ruth ends with this remarkable genealogy, tracing the line from Perez through to David.

Isn't it interesting? The first name that we met in the book of Ruth was the name Elimelech, my God is king. The last name in the book of Ruth is the name of the man whom God, the sovereign God, determined should be the king over his people.

[32 : 03] And all the events in the book of Ruth, all the disparate lines of providence and all the remarkable occurrences and the turns and twists of circumstance, they all have this end in view, that God will place his anointed king over his people.

What was the opening line of the book of Ruth? In those days when the judges ruled, when there was no king in Israel, and everything seemed to be so chaotic, people doing what they saw fit and sinning against him with such boldness, and all the time it is God's determinate purpose that there will be a king in Israel, acknowledged by all, honored by all, crowned by all, and he will sit on God's throne and wear God's crown and will have God's covenant binding to him and God's faithfulness committed to him.

It is God's determinate purpose that through this whole history his king will be appointed and will sit on his throne over his people, and I tell you tonight, that is the end of God's story still.

Through all the disparate lines of this world's history, as kings of the earth combined to plot against God and his anointed, through all the circumstances of time and space and history, in your life, in the life of our nation, in the international arena, in all that is going on, the Bible holds out this one great prospect that it is God's singular purpose that at last his king shall be acknowledged as the universal sovereign of all, the Christ of the cross, exalted and ascended to his right hand so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Oh, I must confess tonight sometimes I don't know how God is moving to that end and what he's doing in the world to achieve it, but tonight I hold on to this one singular intimated purpose in Holy Scripture that Jesus Christ, despised and rejected of men, is nonetheless exalted and given prominence and eminence and given a portion with the great and at last every individual man and woman and boy and girl will see God's king seated on God's throne and will acknowledge him as such.

[34 : 57] And all I'm asking tonight is, have you not seen him yet? Have you bowed before the king, the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ?

Ah, there was a day when he stood before the world and the world judged him. and in a sense is still doing so.

But a day is coming when he will judge the world and the world will bow without exception before the Christ of God.

God. Do you remember the great words of the emperor Julian, the apostate on his deathbed? Having done all that he could to extinguish the cause of Jesus Christ, says at last, thou hast triumphed, O Galilean.

It is God's determinate purpose that the Galilean will triumph. Better to be on his side now in a day of grace than be forced to bow the knee before him on a day of judgment.

[36 : 39] I give you Jesus. Will you go with this man? This great redeemer of sinners, will you not take him tonight? Have him, love him as he is offered to you in the gospel?

Take him. Will you not take the hope that he gives you for a future that doesn't depend on your past? And will you not bow before him who has purposed that his king will have universal dominion?

The book of Ruth points me way beyond itself to the ultimate end of all things when kings and queens and princes and nations will say the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

And on that day may we be in him and come with rejoicing to his marriage supper and know him as our Lord and our God.

Amen.alia . .

[38 : 04] . .