

## An [Extra]Ordinary Love Story] Ruth 4:1-12, “Stand By Me”, 12/12/21

Ruth is a story about two widows and God’s care for them in hard times. And we care about widows too- did you know we have a Widows group that meets monthly for food and fellowship called **New Song, reach out to Charlotte Byrd- [byrdcharlotte@comcast.net](mailto:byrdcharlotte@comcast.net)**. Speaking of songs, each of the weeks of our series in Ruth are titled after pop songs. Some you have known and some you haven’t but all of you are going to know this one. **Stand By Me [Title Slide]** Really, this song summarizes the whole book. Ruth has stood by Naomi, after their husbands die, leaves her country and her people and says I’m standing by you Naomi no matter what, Then we see Boaz standing by Ruth at her great time of need while she is gleaning in his fields. and as her guardian-redeemer, all of which will foreshadow our savior born in Bethlehem, Jesus who stands not only by us, but in our place in our great time of need as our savior-redeemer.

But we need to slow down for a moment and remember how we got to chapter 4 because Pastor Matthew left us at a bit of a cliff-hanger. As Pastor Matthew said last week Boaz was a **Guardian-redeemer** for Ruth and Naomi. There was a provision in the Mosaic Law to protect the poor and disadvantaged, a relative had the responsibility to step up to help when tragedy strikes, often they did this by redeeming (buying back) property of family members in financial trouble. When Naomi sees the chessed (lovingkindness of Boaz to Ruth) the light bulb goes on...she sees the opportunity not only to protect her family property, but to carry on her family name, and to match make (like any good parent- we have mates already picked out) kindle love between Ruth and Boaz.

And so Naomi prepares let’s call it a “unique” marriage proposal for Ruth. Now modern proposals have become so over the top and an opportunity to get social media attention...like this one, imagine you are in a theater watching your favorite Disney movie, Sleeping Beauty but the characters look oddly similar to you and your boyfriend. And then the prince proposes to the princess with a ring **[picture]**, the prince throws the ring seemingly through the screen to your boyfriend, who is down on one knee with a ring. **[Picture]** You turn around and all your friends and family happen to also be in the theater and you come to find out your boyfriend has been working on this plan for the past 6 months with a filmmaker for this moment. This is actually a true story. This isn’t quite how it happens, but Boaz would have been just as surprised, when he wakes up on the threshing room floor with Ruth at his feet, who essentially pops the question. Boaz says yes. And instead of a ring, he gives her 6 measures of Barley...far more practical than a ring anyway. And when Ruth shares the good news with Naomi she replies, **v.18 “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”** What is this matter? Boaz’s Yes, has one obstacle, there is a closer relative that has that duty of guardian-redeemer first. Naomi is right, Boaz doesn’t waste a moment addressing this obstacle and this is where we start in chapter 4.

**v.1 Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate...** In ancient times the city gate was not only the entry point into town it was also the heart of the community. The gate was the seat of government and the seat of important business transactions.

...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. <sup>2</sup> Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so.

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

And why wouldn't he? For very little risk he could carry out a respected family duty and financially make a good investment for himself and his family in future years as he saw it. This was a win-win situation, like buying the property next store. Ahhh...but like a shrewd businessman, Boaz says there's a catch. <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire (marry) Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

The first agreement was expected, this certainly was not. Boaz is carrying the spirit of the Levirate Law (chapter 1) into this arrangement- the spirit of the Law was to protect the family lineage through marriage and childbearing. The property isn't risky, but marrying certainly would be for this man. She is a Moabitess, a foreigner, it also could cause tension in his own household with his wife and existing family, suddenly he realized this isn't a financial investment, this is a financial burden. The property wouldn't be for him and his kids, it's intended for Ruth, Naomi and their family line.

This is Boaz's shrewd and subtle way of saying, "This is how far I'm willing to go for Ruth, I'm all-in and committed to Ruth and the family...are you?" Now the hearers of this story would have been on the edge of their seat, is he going to say yes or no? By the way we don't know his name- let's just call him Mr. Wrong, we want him to say no, because at this point we are invested in the relationship between Ruth and Boaz, he's Mr. Right.

**Title Slide** Now, I'd like to meddle in your dating relationships for a moment, and this is a good time to do it. Marriage isn't for everyone but it is for many. What made Boaz and Ruth such a great match? It was certainly not their status in life, their ethnic background, their looks, their age, their social economics, education, none of this mattered. What they shared in common was their spiritual and moral foundation. They were committed to God and each other, embody integrity and the *chesed* of God. Singles who are looking for a mate- this is far more important than anything else. All those other things are surface level and within a decade won't matter much. Don't marry for money, don't marry for beauty, don't marry because of their job, don't marry because they make you laugh or because you can't keep your hands off each other. Just as quickly as you convince yourself that guy or girl is Mr. or Mrs. Right for any of those reasons you can convince yourself at some point into marriage they are Mr. or Mrs. Wrong. You wait for

the right guy or girl and get the foundation right- a relationship built on God, on his character and the same vision of his life for you. Ok, meddling over- back to the story because we are waiting to hear how Mr. Wrong is going to respond.

<sup>6</sup>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."

So Mr. Wrong gets cold feet and backs out, proving himself unworthy of Ruth. Ruth is a woman of remarkable character and self-sacrifice, was who was willing to sacrifice her future for her mother-in-law, this man could only think of his own self-interests and self-protection. He only could ask the question, "What's in it for me? I will only help if I benefit." This isn't *chessed* love. And because of his self-protection, he misses out being part of God's plan of redemption.

But Boaz proves to be worthy of a truly remarkable woman like Ruth. He is willing to take on the risk. He is willing to pay the price to acquire the field and property, to risk the social fallout of marrying a Moabite foreigner. Boaz was determined to stand by Ruth not only as guardian-redeemer, but as her husband. So now down to business, it's time to sign the papers...except it's ancient Israel, do things a little differently- <sup>7</sup>(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.) <sup>8</sup>So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal. Boaz then announces his commitment and confirms it among the elders at the gate. Now that the business side of redemption is done, it is time for the wedding ceremony.

The half-baked cake of Chapter 1, when it comes out of the oven we find out God intended it to be a three-tiered wedding cake. The elders of the town and the people came together to give the new husband and wife a triple blessing, all three of which turn out to be prophetic. First to Ruth: <sup>11</sup>We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. In both cases the Lord opened their wombs and enabled them to bear children- 12 sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel. The community is praying that God would give Ruth a key role, just like Rachel and Leah in the future of God's redemptive work in history through his people. And certainly she does in a way more extraordinary than any of them could have imagined- the great grandmother of King David and in the line of King Jesus, the other baby born in Bethlehem.

For Boaz: *May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.* Not only are we reading about Boaz centuries later, but he becomes the famous patriarch of Bethlehem.

To the Couple: <sup>12</sup>Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. [The Tale of Tamar in sermon Archives]The blessing seems to be that God would take less than ideal and kosher circumstances like those of Tamar (who had a child through her father-in-law, Judah) in order to keep the family line and yet in God's grace and mercy and *chessed*, he uses these fallen

circumstances for his good and sovereign plan of redemption. Just the kind of thing God would do.

This is as far as we want to go today in the text and talk about us. You say, "I love stories with happy endings, (we were just watching You Got Mail this weekend)," I love a good wedding, some of the guys are saying, "I love a hero story." ...But what does this have to do with me? I'm so glad you asked.

The story of Boaz and Ruth isn't just the Bible's version of Casablanca or The Notebook. It is here because **it is our redemption story**. We are Naomi and Ruth- poor, needy and with no hope apart from a redeemer. We find ourselves in this place because of our sin, our rebellion against our creator. We are eternally lost and we need redemption- we need a redeemer to buy us back so we can have eternal life. And the redeemer isn't Boaz, it's Jesus Christ. Do you remember when Jesus on the road to Emmaus just after his resurrection in Luke 24, where he showed those disciples throughout all the law and prophets how it all was about himself? I think when Jesus got to Ruth- he said, "Now roll up your sleeves guys, let me show you how chapter 4 is all about how I redeemed humanity on the cross." I don't know what Jesus said, but I think we would have shown them at least three ways Ruth 4 points to Christ as Redeemer.

### **#1 Only Jesus can do the WORK of Redemption**

Notice that Ruth is peculiarly absent from the story in Chapter 4. Why? **3:18 "Sit still my daughter until you know how the matter will turn out. For the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day."** What is the matter? What is the business that he's going to attend to? Redemption. Sit still because the work of redemption is his alone to fulfill. Ruth is powerless to accomplish it. She can't add to it. It's a beautiful corollary to the work of Jesus Christ. **[Point #1 Slide]** In John 17, Jesus on the cross prayed to the Father as he knew that final business of redemption was about to take place. *He said, I have finished the work which you have given me to do.* And then he went to the cross. And on the cross, he used those words. *"It is finished."* In Greek, one word, tetelestai. It is finished. It is completed. The transaction is completed. I have finished the work.

So what do we do to get saved? "Well, I really have to turn everything over to him." "I have to confess sin enough." "I have to be a good person." "I have to go to church enough." I, I, I... I love what Charles Spurgeon once said. "It is not your grip on the Savior that saves you. It's the Savior's grip on you that saves you." You place yourself by faith in his saving grip not your own... By faith. *By grace through faith, not of works lest anyone should boast.* The work of redemption is accomplished. So you can sit in the grace of Jesus toward you.

### **#2 Only Jesus is WORTHY to accomplish Redemption.**

Not just anyone could redeem Ruth and Naomi, it had to be someone related and someone found worthy, only Boaz fit that description. Not just anyone could redeem humanity. Only someone related to humanity...not an angel or other being. But it also had to be someone found worthy of God, perfectly holy and sinless, sin is what got us in this situation in the first place. That disqualifies everyone who has ever lived. Who is perfect but God? That's why only

the God-man, Jesus is worthy. Revelation 5 speaks of this beautifully. Like the redemption transaction we saw Boaz make, Revelation 5 depicts a redemption transaction for humanity.

**Revelation 5** *Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" [The scroll is like signing paperwork for redemption] <sup>3</sup> But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. <sup>4</sup> I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

### **#3 Only Jesus is WILLING to pay the COST of Redemption**

Boaz's redemption of Ruth was not free. It cost him something that Mr. Wrong was unwilling to pay. He purchases Naomi's field, but Boaz doesn't need a field. Boaz is rich. He's got lots of fields. He's not in love with the field, He's in love with the girl. And he is willing to buy the field to get the bride. Sound familiar? Sound like Matthew 13, Jesus said the kingdom of God shall be like a treasure hidden in a field. And in his joy, the man sells everything he has to buy the field that he might get the treasure. Jesus sold everything...left heaven, and gave that which is most precious, his very life, his blood by dying on the cross. And not begrudgingly, but with joy. For the joy set before him he endured the cross. We are his treasure, we are his bride. Do you know this love of Christ for you? Spurgeon- "My entire theology can be condensed into four words: Jesus died for me." And he would have done it if you were the only person that needed redemption. These Bible stories like Ruth are not meant to be cold facts about God, salvation and heaven to fill our heads, the Gospel isn't some mechanical formula where we say these words and repeat these verses and say this prayer just right. Redemption is always personal just like we see here in Ruth, have you made it personal?

Some of us have a hard time accepting that Jesus' offer of redemption. Maybe it's pride, you don't think you need it. You are a good person. But by who's standard? Or maybe it's because you feel too unworthy. "But you don't know my story Nate. You don't know what I've done." You are right I don't, but Jesus does. And he counted the cost of what it would take to bring you home. To redeem you. You say "but I'm not this, I'm not that...I'm not Ruth, I'm more like Orpah...I would have gone home. I'm not Boaz, I'm more like Mr. Wrong and I might not have taken the risk." You're right, but Jesus is- Jesus is the better Ruth, he's the better Boaz, in your place! He's your redeemer. **Jesus paid for my \_\_\_\_\_.**

And this is the love story we are entrusted with to share with the world. What a privilege! A world that needs to hear an extraordinary love story today.