

Redeemed

Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17

8 At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! **9** So he asked, “Who are you?” “I am Ruth, your slave,” she replied. “Spread your cloak over me, for you are a family redeemer.” **10** Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor. **11** Now don’t be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character. **12** Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. **13** Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that’s good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn’t want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning.”

4:13 Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he was intimate with her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. **14** Then the women said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel. **15** He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” **16** Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him. **17** The neighbor women said, “A son has been born to Naomi,” and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Exploration

If you could change any one thing about your life, what would it be? How do you think your life would be different if that one thing were different? If we were to ask Ruth that question based upon the situation she found herself in at the end of chapter 1, she would probably say that she would have her husband back from the dead. Ruth, however, did not waste time wishing her circumstances were different. Instead she demonstrated her trust in God by sacrificing her own livelihood in order to protect, provide, and care for her mother-in-law, Naomi. By looking at the end of Ruth's story, we will be reminded that our current circumstances don't have the final word. God does and though we will face much difficulty and pain this side of eternity, He is always at work in our lives, writing a better story for us than we could write for ourselves.

CONTEXT (RUTH 2:1–4:22)

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22). Ruth took the initiative to help provide for Naomi by going to the nearby grainfields and trailing the harvesters to gather left-behind grain (2:2). Boaz, "a prominent man of noble character" (2:1) and one of Naomi's relatives, noticed and befriended Ruth. He immediately took action to provide for the two widows.

In last week's session we looked at the custom of levirate marriage. Levirate marriage required that when a married man died childless, his brother or next of kin had to marry the widow and father a son who would carry on the family name (Deut. 25:5-10). Naomi knew that Boaz, as a relative of her husband Elimelech, could be a suitable husband in a levirate marriage. She helped Ruth understand how to approach Boaz. Ruth followed her advice and asked for Boaz's help as a family redeemer (3:12). A family redeemer had responsibilities in addition to fulfilling the levirate marriage. One was to seek vengeance if a wrong was committed against a family member. (This role does not play a factor in the story of Ruth.) Another responsibility of the family redeemer was to assure a deceased man's estate stayed in the family.

Eventually, Ruth married Boaz and became pregnant. They named their son Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse and a grandson named David. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus informs readers that "Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse and Jesse fathered King David" (1:5). God chose a non-Israelite woman to be included in the lineage of Jesus, our Redeemer.

Conversation

› **What is your favorite ending to a book or movie? How was the main character different at the end? What did he or she have to overcome?**

› **Why do you think we love redemption stories so much?**

We love stories of people overcoming insurmountable odds or past mistakes to do seemingly impossible things because they give us hope. They give us courage and make us feel like we can overcome daunting challenges and do great things. After her husband and her father-in-law died, Ruth had very little hope of a bright future. Last session, we saw Ruth show Christlike kindness to Naomi in the midst of her own difficult circumstances. It is important to note that God did not owe Ruth a happy ending. As we finish our study of Ruth, however, we will see how God, despite the suffering and difficulty in her way, redeemed Ruth's story. Lead students to know and believe that God is redeeming their story as well. While it may not seem obvious to them now, God is writing a better story for all who trust Christ than they could write for themselves (Rev. 21:5-7).

RUTH 3:8-13

Although Naomi struggled with feelings of bitterness over her losses (see 1:20-21), she affirmed that God had shown kindness to her when Ruth was allowed to gather grain in the fields of none other than a close relative of her deceased husband (see 2:20). Furthermore, Naomi was surely aware of the stipulations in God's law about preserving family names and property (see Lev. 25:25-28; Deut. 25:5-10). Finally, and to her credit, Naomi continued to consider ways she could contribute to her and Ruth's well-being and future security (see Ruth 3:1). In particular, she recognized an opportunity for Boaz, a close relative, to act as the family redeemer.

› **Getting Boaz to act as the family redeemer meant that Ruth had to first approach him. What risks did Ruth take as she followed Naomi's advice?**

By following Naomi's advice and laying down near Boaz while he slept, Ruth risked her reputation. She also risked being rejected by Boaz and finding herself in an even worse situation. When Boaz awoke in the night, Ruth identified herself and asked for his help as the family redeemer. Knowing that Boaz was a close relative of her late husband, Ruth had come to Boaz privately and asked him to spread his cloak over her (v. 9). In Hebrew, this is the same phrase Boaz used when he observed that Ruth had come for refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (2:12). This indicates that Ruth's actions were ultimately rooted in her faith that God was at work behind the scenes writing a better story than she could write for herself. Ruth was asking Boaz to be her family redeemer who would protect her and marry her so her late husband's line and inheritance would continue in Israel.

Conversation

› **What does Boaz’s response to Ruth’s request (vv. 10-11) tell us about how he treated Ruth? How do you see God’s kindness evidenced here?**

Boaz complimented Ruth as a noble woman and agreed to pursue the matter of family redemption the next day, explaining that a closer family member first had to be consulted. In verse 11, Boaz told Ruth he would do what she asked. There is no indication from the text that this was a sexual act, as Boaz’s response to Ruth’s request was to honor her and pray God’s blessing upon her (vv. 10-11). Furthermore, by sending Ruth home with barley, Boaz protected Ruth from wrongful accusations (vv. 14-16). In so doing, Boaz showed her respect and kindness. The act of uncovering Boaz’s feet and lying down was meant to demonstrate dependence on Boaz and further evidence that their relationship was founded upon honor and respect.

› **What can we learn about how God would have us conduct ourselves in relationships with people of the opposite sex from the story of Ruth and Boaz?**

› **What about their courtship might be unwise for us to emulate (see 1 Cor. 6:18; 10:13)?**

We should be careful of thinking that Boaz and Ruth’s courtship is an example of how we should conduct ourselves before marriage—this was a special situation that we should not assume applies directly to our context. It would be unwise for us to assume that we are strong enough to lie down with someone of the opposite sex without compromising. We must remember that the Bible commands us to “flee sexual immorality” by actively avoiding situations where we will be tempted toward sexual sin. What we can and should imitate is the way they sought to honor God and each other. Challenge students to determine to honor and respect people of the opposite sex by praying for them and serving them rather than treating them as objects.

RUTH 4:13-17

In verses 1-12, Boaz began the process of marrying Ruth by first going to the gate of the town and offering his family member the opportunity to “redeem” Ruth. When the family member refused to do so, Boaz immediately followed through with his promise and married Ruth.

› **How did God redeem Ruth’s past (v. 13)? What about Ruth makes her a surprising recipient of God’s grace?**

Leader Prep

We can easily parallel Boaz's redemption of Ruth (and Naomi) with Christ's redemption of sinners. Boaz's role as family redeemer was fulfilled in greater measure by Christ, our Redeemer.

RUTH 3:10-13

These verses clearly indicate that Boaz did not misconstrue Ruth's intentions. Boaz voiced his willingness to marry Ruth, thus redeeming Elimelech's name and family. You have shown more kindness now than before referred to Ruth's initial kindness to Naomi. Initially, Ruth committed herself to Naomi (see 1:16-17). Now Ruth committed herself to Boaz as a potential wife. Boaz responded positively and immediately. He voiced his elation that Ruth had chosen him. He knew that Ruth could have pursued younger men, whether rich or poor. The phrase rich or poor speaks volumes to Ruth's character. In essence, Boaz knew Ruth could have had practically any man of her picking.

Even after Boaz communicated his willingness to marry her, no doubt fear and hesitation existed for Ruth. Perhaps Boaz sensed her anxieties and attempted to ease those feelings with don't be afraid, my daughter. Consider for a moment all Ruth had experienced: the death of her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband; separation from her sister-in-law; childlessness; living in a foreign land with only her mother-in-law; foraging for food. Boaz attempted to reassure her.

While willing to assume his redeemer responsibility, Boaz informed Ruth of the existence of another potential redeemer closer than I am. Ruth and Naomi appear to have been unaware of this person. Although the Bible does not say, Boaz could have been a second cousin to Elimelech while this unnamed redeemer was a first cousin. We do not know the specifics.

Boaz's words must have been discouraging to Ruth. She knew Boaz's character. He had treated her kindly and honorably. He had demonstrated his generosity to her. Ruth must have thought: What might be the character of this nearer relative? Kind? Caring? Abusive? Neglectful? Aloof?

Boaz had no option. He knew the closer redeemer had the initial responsibility to redeem Ruth. Boaz told her: if he wants to redeem you, that's good. Was he trying to encourage her? Boaz and Ruth both knew that her redemption by someone else might not be good. Boaz offered a supportive word with but if he doesn't want to redeem you ... I will. Regardless of the outcome, Boaz promised to tend to the issue in the morning. Boaz gave Ruth one final gift of



Ruth 4:1-12 records Boaz's meeting with the closest redeemer. Boaz gathered 10 men of the city to serve as witnesses to whatever decision the closer redeemer made. Boaz made the man aware of the availability of property that belonged to their relative, Elimelech. He reminded him that, as the family redeemer, he had the opportunity to purchase the property. The man said, "I want to redeem it" (v. 4). Boaz then informed him that when he bought the property he also acquired Ruth, the wife of the deceased man. The phrase "to perpetuate the man's name" (v. 5) is a reference to Levirate marriage (marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother).

Conversation

› **How did God redeem Naomi's pain? Compare Naomi's response to the birth of Obed in verses 14-15 with her response to the death of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:15,20-21).**

› **Read Psalm 127:3-5. Why was the birth of Obed such a precious gift? How did his birth demonstrate God's grace?**

Ruth wasn't an Israelite, she was from Moab and yet God wrote a better story for her life. As a recently widowed woman in a foreign land, Ruth faced a difficult future. In the midst of her pain, God graciously led her to Boaz who married her and provided for her. Furthermore, the Lord blessed them with a son. In ancient Israel, sons were considered tremendous blessings as they would continue the family name. By giving Ruth a husband and a son, the Lord graciously redeemed Ruth's seemingly hopeless situation.

› **Why do you think the story of Ruth concludes with a genealogy of David (vv. 17-21)? Ruth is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy (Matt. 1:5). What is significant about this?**

The story concludes with a linear genealogy linking the child, Obed, backward and forward. It traces his roots back to Perez, the child born in Genesis 38 out of the dubious relationship between Judah and a foreign woman, Tamar. It also traces his line forward to King David, who is highlighted not simply because he was a great king, but also because he was the Lord's answer for the anarchy of the days of the judges, in which this story took place (1:1) and whose kingdom was promised to endure forever (2 Sam. 7:16). The genealogy thus shows us that the Lord had been pursuing bigger plans than just bringing together two individuals or restoring the emptiness of a Judean widow. Their story formed part of the bigger plan to provide the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, whom Israel needed. Ruth stands out as an example of God's heart for the outsider and their key involvement in His plan.

GO DEEPER OPTION: Take a moment to scan the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1. Many readers will recognize the names of prominent individuals such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the kings David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah. The fact that God used these men in such a way comes as no surprise. Other names in Jesus' genealogy might be surprising. For example, other than the fact that we read their names in Jesus' genealogy, what do we know about Shealtiel [shih AL tih el], Abiud [uh BIGH uhd], and Azor (Matt. 1:12-14)? The answer: practically nothing. A closer reading of the genealogy reveals the names of four women, including Ruth. The record of these women, as well as the record of the relatively unknown men, demonstrates that God can surprise us with those He chooses to bring about His purposes.

Leader Prep

“six measures of barley” (3:15). Ruth returned to Naomi and “told her everything the man had done for her” (3:16).

RUTH 4:13-17

Ruth 4:1-12 records Boaz’s meeting with the closest redeemer. Boaz gathered 10 men of the city to serve as witnesses to whatever decision the closer redeemer made. Boaz made the man aware of the availability of property that belonged to their relative, Elimelech. He reminded him that, as the family redeemer, he had the opportunity to purchase the property. The man said, “I want to redeem it” (v. 4). Boaz then informed him that when he bought the property he also acquired Ruth, the wife of the deceased man. The phrase “to perpetuate the man’s name” (v. 5) is a reference to levirate marriage.

At the mention of Ruth, the closer redeemer insisted he could not serve as the kinsman-redeemer lest he “ruin” his own inheritance (v. 6). The Bible provides no illumination as to why a marriage to Ruth would jeopardize the closer redeemer’s own inheritance. Regardless, the closer redeemer forfeited his right to Elimelech’s property and relinquished his right to redeem Ruth. This provided Boaz the opportunity to take on the role of Ruth’s redeemer. He took Ruth and she became his wife. The Lord caused Ruth to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

Naomi’s friends celebrated such a momentous occasion with an enthusiastic “Praise the Lord.” The entire community had reason to rejoice. The women delighted in the fact that the Lord did not leave Naomi (and Ruth) without a family redeemer. Boaz’s action redeemed Elimelech’s family, perpetuated the family name, and saved Naomi and Ruth from potential lives of adversity. The women voiced a prayer that the name of Ruth’s child might become well known in Israel. Boaz indeed perpetuated Elimelech’s family name in that we know this child as the grandfather of King David. The jubilation of Naomi’s friends continued with the fact that this child would renew Naomi’s life and sustain her as she aged. No one could deny the love that Ruth had for Naomi: she is better to you than seven sons. One can visualize the proud grandmother Naomi as she took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him.

When the women of the community stated that “a son has been born to Naomi,” they recognized the importance of the child in redeeming Naomi’s life. Boaz and Ruth named the child •Obed, meaning “servant of the Lord.” Perhaps Boaz and Ruth chose the name as their prayer that this baby might grow to become a servant of Yahweh. Obed met and exceeded all expectations as he, in the lineage of Jesus, served all humankind.



As Boaz willingly became Ruth’s redeemer, Jesus willingly took on the role of our Redeemer when He took our place on the cross.

Application

CENTRAL TRUTH

God is always at work in our lives. He is writing a better story than we could write for ourselves.

➤➤ **ITEM 8** (LEADER PACK) Display the **Kinsman Redeemer** item that is included in the leader pack. Point out how Boaz was included in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1 and how his role as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer points us forward to Christ's role as the Redeemer of His bride, the church (Eph. 5:25-33; Rev. 19:7-8).

NOW WHAT?

- › **Share about a difficulty you've recently faced. How might God be writing a better story for your life even through this difficulty?**

- › **The Book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God's faithfulness. Where have you seen His faithfulness at work in your life? Where do you need to trust His faithfulness now?**

The fact that God is telling a better story doesn't mean that our lives will always be easy and comfortable. As we have seen with Ruth and Naomi, their story was devastating at times. Furthermore, the story of Jesus is the greatest story ever told and at one point, Jesus Himself cries out in desperate agony, "My God, my God why have You forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Jesus, however, faced the cross "for the joy set before Him" (Heb. 12:1)—His story ended with the greatest act of love and goodness the world has ever known. God did not waste Christ's pain, suffering, and difficulty—He won't waste ours either. Knowing this frees us from slavery to our circumstances and wakes us up to joy of living for Christ and His kingdom.

- › **How can we encourage one another to trust that God is telling a better story for our lives?**

- › **How does it encourage you to know that God includes "outsiders" like Ruth in His story of redemption? What does that tell us about our mission?**

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section in their Personal Study Guides and to take the truths of this section and apply them to their lives.

› **Dwell:** Read Luke 14:15-24. The parable of the banquet further illustrates a truth that the Book of Ruth introduces: God has a heart for outsiders and goes out of His way to graciously include them in His plan of redemption. What does this mean for you? Who are the outsiders in your city, community, school, and extracurricular activities? How might you reach out to them with the hope of the gospel this week?

› **Memorize:** Ruth 2:20

› **Pray:** Thank God for telling a better story in your life than you could tell for yourself. Spend some time thinking about difficult situations you and your family have faced in the past and how God has used those situations for your spiritual growth and to bring Him glory. Thank Him for always being at work in your life and pray that He would help you to grow to trust Him more and more, specifically understanding that His story is the best design and plan for your life.

KEEP ON DIGGING

Read Genesis 50:15-21. Joseph's brothers had plotted his murder only to get cold feet and settle on selling him into slavery instead. They then convinced Jacob, Joseph's father, that he was dead by slaughtering a goat and covering Joseph's cloak with its blood. Though Joseph continued to face tremendous difficulties in prison, God blessed him with the ability to interpret dreams which eventually led him to a prominent position in Egypt as second in command to Pharaoh. Joseph, however, clearly saw God's hand even in his brother's sinful actions. God does not always allow us to see the specific ways He is writing a better story for us, but we, like Joseph, can have faith that God is writing a better story for us than we would write for ourselves.



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session with a study in Galatians, see lifeway.com/ETBWIN17JJR. For **free** training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.