

Ruth

Sermon #3: A Plan for Redemption

Ruth 3:12-13, 4

Kevin Maurice ---- February 26, 2023

As a pastor, I get to officiate and be a part of people's wedding days. And occasionally, what makes this really special and fun for me as a youth pastor is when a former student is either the bride or the groom. This past October I got to officiate at a wedding of a former student, a young man who grew up here at Grace. He came through the middle school ministry and then went into the high school group. He graduated and went to college. He met the love of his life and proposed at graduation and then there was going to be a wedding.

Now usually at weddings I wear a suit kind of like this. Occasionally I'm given a tie to match the groomsman or a flower in my lapel. But this wedding was a little different. I met with the couple a few months before their big day and they told me that every part of this wedding—the ceremony, the reception, all of it—was going to be Viking themed. It was awesome. They found this venue that looked like a medieval hunting lodge out in the woods. Their reception—the banquet—was going to be this Viking feast. There were going to be sword duels at the reception with foam swords, I think. And every guest in attendance was supposed to be in medieval attire. They made this so clear. They said, "We do not expect this of you. You don't have to do that. You're not required to participate." And I said, "Are you kidding? Of course, I do!"



So listen, if you're looking for a medieval minister or a Jedi to officiate your next wedding ceremony ... or a kid's birthday party... you know who to call.

I love weddings. And the part that I enjoy the most is the vows. The bride and the groom vow to one another, and they say things like, "I take you to be mine before God and these witnesses to have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, from this day forward until death do us part."

Vows are so special because they're the swearing of this sacred oath. Two people are initiating a covenant promise. And it's a promise for this day and for the future.

Today we're going to turn one last time to the Book of Ruth, and there will be a promise for the present and the future. And it's actually a promise for our present and our future, because Ruth ends with a wedding.

The Book of Ruth is a story of ordinary people in an ordinary place at an ordinary time doing ordinary things. And today we're going to see that God does something extraordinary. Because God, from the very beginning, has had a plan for redemption—in this story and in our story. And His plan includes three things. We're going to see all three today in Ruth chapter 4. And it all starts with a wedding.

Now as a brief recap, the Book of Ruth is all about loss. A woman, Naomi, loses everything. There's a famine in her homeland, so she and her husband and their two sons move to this foreign country. And while they're there her husband dies. Her two sons go on and marry, but after ten years neither of them has any grandchildren. And then they die.

Naomi suffers this incredible loss. She's left with nothing. She's got these two daughters-in-law and she tells them, "Hey, just go home. Be with your own families." But one of them, Ruth, stays with her. She says, "You're my family now." And she chooses to go with her. And the two of them go back to Israel. And when they get there, Naomi is bitter. She's empty and kind of hollowed out inside. She has no hope. Have you ever felt that way?

Naomi is stuck. And Ruth could be in that place too, but she's not, because she chooses to put her hope into God, and that He has a plan. She doesn't know what that is, but she hopes that it has something to do with her life. So, she goes out to work in a field that just so happens to be owned by a guy named Boaz, who just so happens to be related to Naomi's late husband, and who just so happens to be someone who could rewrite the ending of this story for these two women.

Now we know that none of this “just so happened.” There are no coincidences in this story, because God is at work, and He has been the entire time.

At midnight one night, Ruth goes to meet with Boaz. He’s asleep in his field, so she wakes him up and she says, “You are a redeemer.” This is a significant statement. In ancient Israel there was this custom of kinsman-redeemers. People within your family circle could step into your life to redeem in various ways. Sometimes it was financially—they would buy back what was lost for you. Other times it was relationally—if a family member got married and didn’t have any children and then he died, it was one of the kinsman-redeemer’s sacred duties to marry the widow, to have children, and to carry on the family name.

And so, Ruth is saying, *Hey, culturally, relationally, theologically, Boaz, you are my hope for some sort of future. And the way that you fulfill that is by marrying me.* This is a marriage proposal.

Ruth 3:12-13

“It is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do that. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you.”

Now please open up your Bibles to Ruth chapter 3, and we’re going to see how this story ends. Ruth chapter 3, starting in verse 12. Boaz hears this and he says, “It is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you.”

So, Boaz is interested. He wants to do this. He accepts the marriage proposal. There’s going to be a wedding. But then there’s this plot twist. He tells Ruth there will be a wedding, but he might not be the groom. Because somewhere out there is another closer relative of Naomi’s family. And so, Boaz is willing, but he’s not next in line. This other guy is.

Ruth 4:1

Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.”

So, in the beginning of chapter 4, Boaz is waiting at the city gates where people would congregate and meet. And it just so happens that this other potential redeemer walks by. Chapter 4, verse 1: “Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, ‘Turn aside, friend; sit down here.’”

Now this is so intriguing. Because in a story that is full of names, Boaz doesn’t say this man’s name. “Friend” is a generous translation, because in the Hebrew the word is literally “such-and-such” or “so-and-so.” It’s saying, *What is that guy’s name? ... it’s ... whatshisname.*

We have been told the names of everyone in this story. In chapter 1 we hear about Elimelech who dies after three verses without saying a word. And then we meet Mahlon and Chilion, who die a few verses later without saying a thing. We know the name of Ruth’s sister-in-law, Naomi’s other daughter-in-law, Orpah, who at least gets a sentence in before she exits the story. We know the names of everyone in Ruth. They’re all dead or gone, but we know them. And here comes a living, potential redeemer and we’re never told his name—which is fascinating, because we’re about to see that he cares deeply about his name.

Boaz explains the situation to So-and-So, and he offers this guy the opportunity to redeem. He says, “Hey, there’s some land that belongs to this dead relative,” and Whatshisname says, “Yeah, I’ll take it.” And then Boaz adds, “If you take the land, there’s going to be a wedding. Because you also take this Moabite widow to be your wife. And listen ... not to mention her mother-in-law.” It comes with the package.

Ruth 4:6

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.”

And that’s when So-and-So says, “I’m out.” 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.”

I can’t redeem it. I might endanger my own inheritance. This unnamed non-redeemer hears about the obligation to Ruth and to Naomi and he says, “Well, I don’t want that part of it. I don’t want her.” Now this could be because of her lowly status. It could be because of her lack of wealth. It could be because Ruth is a foreigner. It could be all of those reasons. But it’s certainly this one: he’s worried about his name.

Ruth, after about ten years of marriage, had no children. It’s reasonable to believe that she’s unable to get pregnant. And if Whatshisname marries her and they can’t conceive—if there are no children—then his estate, his lineage, his inheritance and his name, are in danger.

He says, “If I marry her, my name might fade away.” And so, he tells Boaz, “You be the redeemer.” And then, So-and-So fades out of the story.

Ruth 4:10

“Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have redeemed 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.”

And Boaz, who had already accepted this wedding proposal, is the redeemer, and he gets to be the groom. And in front of this crowd of witnesses, he speaks his vows. He says, “Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have redeemed 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.” Till death do us part.

Now let's not lose sight of something. Boaz doesn't know what's going to happen next. There's a good chance that his estate, his lineage, his inheritance, his name, are now in danger of being lost. But Boaz chooses to marry Ruth anyway—Ruth, a woman with no prospects, no future. Boaz marries her. He risks his future to give her one.

God has a plan for redemption. And this is what it looks like. And then God keeps writing. He keeps tapping away at the typewriter, because He's not done.

So, Boaz marries Ruth and they live happily ever after. But the most important part of the story is still on the horizon. Because first there was a wedding. Now there's going to be a baby.

Ruth 4:13

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

In verse 13: “Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.”

The author of Ruth made a point to tell us that Ruth had been unable to have a child before her husband died. And then all of this time, we've been focused on Ruth and Naomi and wondering if they would be redeemed, and Boaz does that. But then God keeps going. He wasn't finished with the story. And notice, the Bible says that it was God who enabled Ruth to conceive. So, God has providentially arranged and orchestrated everything to get to this point, and now He miraculously enables a pregnancy and a birth to take place.

Ruth 4:16-17

**Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him.
¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed ...**

And look who we find holding the baby. “Then Naomi took the child in her arms and she cared for him. And the women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son!’ And they named him Obed ...”

The story's ending with Naomi cuddling a child named Obed, which in Hebrew means "servant of God." And I love this detail—it's great. Notice who names the baby, because it's not Naomi. It's these women from Bethlehem. We met them before in chapter 1. When Naomi gets back, they say, "Hey, is that Naomi?" And she says, "No! Do not call me that anymore. That's not my name. You'll call me Mara, which means 'bitter.'"

And now Naomi's holding this little baby on her lap, and it's these women who named her grandson. It's kind of like they're saying, *Hey, listen, Naomi, we'll take it from here. You've got a pretty terrible track record of naming people. So, you don't get to name the baby. We will.*

And you know what? I don't think Naomi cares. I think she's too busy counting the little rolls and folds on his arms and on his legs and playing with his hair, trying to figure out whose eyes he has; because she's not bitter anymore. She's not empty; she's full.

God Has a Plan for Redemption

Now make no mistake. Her loss hasn't been replaced. It hasn't been restored. Her husband is still dead. She hasn't remarried. Her two sons are still dead. And those losses in her life are not just reversed; God has given her something different. Because God has a plan for redemption, and it probably wasn't Naomi's plan for her own life. But it was God's plan in her life, and it seems by her posture here at the end of the story that Naomi has gotten to a place where she says, *I'm okay with that*. She's starting to see the bigger picture, that God was weaving a story together. And even in the midst of loss, even when it hurt, God is still God, and we are still His.

And even if we can't see or imagine how He might redeem where we are or what we've lost, we can trust that He has a plan. He has a plan in this world, He has a plan in our lives, and it will always be for our good and for His glory, even if we can't see how it's going to turn out.

Naomi actually gets a glimpse, because she gets to hold this baby. But even she doesn't get to marvel at the full picture. Because redemption continues to ripple out from this moment, and the Book of Ruth has one more signpost for us pointing to our ultimate redemption. There was a wedding, then there was a baby. Soon there will be a king.

If you remember, the very first verse of Ruth tells us that this story takes place at a time in Israel's history when the judges ruled. Immediately preceding the Book of Ruth in the Bible is

the Book of Judges. And it ends with this verse: “In those days, there was no king in Israel, and everyone did whatever was right in their own eyes.”

The people of God never had a king because they weren't meant to. Everyone else had kings. But God's people were supposed to follow Him. He's their king. But the people wanted human intermediaries to settle disputes and uphold laws, and so God gave them judges, or law keepers. At least, that's what they were supposed to be.

But what would happen is there would just be this cycle where people would disobey God and would sin, and so God would discipline them, and that punishment would usually come in the form of a conquering enemy. The people would cry out to God, and so He would send a judge, and He would rescue His people. But then the cycle would start over, again and again—everyone doing whatever was right in their own eyes.

And then the page turns to the Book of Ruth. And in the days when the judges ruled, everyone was doing whatever was right in their own eyes. But in Bethlehem, this ordinary little town, God had a plan. And there are a couple of people who are committed to doing what was right—not in their eyes, but what's right in God's eyes. And Boaz marries Ruth and they miraculously have a son. And the Book of Ruth includes a family tree. “Naomi took the child in her arms and she cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son!’ And they named his Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

Ruth most likely never met her great-grandson. It's almost certain Naomi passed away before she met her great-great-grandson. And so, what we know, they went to the grave never knowing—that this little boy in Naomi's lap would one day have a son, and that son would one day have a son who would go on to become the greatest king in the history of Israel—King David. That's King David—this is him. He's the man after God's own heart. He'd write most of the Book of Psalms. And God tells David that his kingdom, his throne, his lineage, his name, will go on forever.

The Book of Judges ends with “There was no king.” And the Book of Ruth ends with “there will be a king.”

A wedding between two ordinary people. A baby who, for all we know, lived a fairly ordinary life, leads us to a king. And Ruth and Naomi have no idea. On earth, they didn't get to see the entire image.

Which means that I probably have no idea of the bigger picture of what God is going in and with my life. And neither do you. And the truth is that we'll probably go to our graves never knowing the complete picture, or how far out the ripples extended from our life, or the impact that we had on other people, or who we may have affected for the kingdom of God. God is up to something more significant than just what I can see. He has a plan, even if I can't fathom it.

But what we know for certain is that God has a plan for redemption. Ruth's baby is going to become the grandfather of King David. But the Book of Ruth is still not finished, because—wait—there's more. It's kind of like the last *Lord of the Rings* movie—it just kept going on and on and on. Except in this story there's a purpose. It matters.

Because Ruth finally ends with a genealogy of King David. This is how the Book of Ruth ends: **“This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David.”**

Yeah, we got it. Did we really need this list of hard-to-pronounce names? Couldn't we have just ended four verses earlier the first time we hear about David? Come on—editing here.

No. No, we couldn't. And here's why. This is so cool. Because this exact same genealogy shows up later in the Bible, word for word, person for person. Except that the next time we see it, it doesn't culminate with King David; it ends with the coronation of another king.

This is Matthew chapter 1: **“Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.”**

And years and years and names and names go by, until finally we arrive at **“Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ [King].”**

God's Plan of Redemption is All About the King

God has a plan for redemption. And it wasn't just about a king. This was all about the king. That's what this entire story has all been about from the very beginning.

If the Book of Ruth had ended in this little village with an old grandmother hugging a new grandson, you might wonder why it's even in the Bible. But the story doesn't end there.

Because Ruth takes us into the bigger arc of redemptive history. This whole time God was not only planning the redemption of one family; He was preparing for the coming king in Israel, King David, which was preparing for the King of Kings, Jesus; which means that this whole time God has been planning for the redemption of the world. This whole story is about the King, Jesus—the King that comes to us as a baby.

Because more than a thousand years later after the end of the Book of Ruth, in the exact same city where Naomi is holding this baby boy, perhaps in the same fields where Ruth and Boaz first met, a thousand years from now there are going to be some shepherds out in a field. And an angel appears to them and announces, “I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the King.”

That’s where we are. That’s where this whole story takes place. This is Bethlehem. It was Naomi’s home. It became Ruth’s home. It’s where King David was born. And years later it was where King Jesus was born. And Jesus is not only born in the city of David; he’s also a direct descendant.

And right in the middle of his family tree, right here in Matthew chapter 1, is the name of this foreign girl from a far-off country who chose to go with her mother-in-law. And she just so happened to meet his guy, and there was a wedding, and then there was a baby, and then there was a king.

The word “redemption” is used twenty-three times in four short chapters in Ruth. Because that’s the point of the entire story. Naomi starts out as this forsaken, husbandless, sonless beggar, and she ends as the great-grandmother of a king, and one of the grandmothers of the King of Kings. Because God has a plan for redemption.

We have a King. We have a King who was born as a baby to become our kinsman-redeemer. That’s why this book is in the Bible, because what we see in Ruth is not just a story of romance. It’s actually a magnificent reflection of our story, because we are Naomi. We are Ruth. We’re the outcast, the foreigner, the stranger. We are the desperate and the poor, the weak, the orphaned, the widow. We’re the helpless, the lonely, the afraid. We’re the ones without hope, without a future, because our hearts and our souls and our lives have been marred by sin, this separation from God.

And because of sin in us and in the world, we’re spiritually poor. We’re morally disgraced and we’re starving for redemption. Sin has brought loss into your life. It’s ruined

relationships. It's destroyed dreams. Sin is why you encounter death and despair and suffering and loss.

God Is Our Redeemer

But listen, God has a plan for redemption. He still has a plan in and for and through your life. And redemption doesn't necessarily mean that He's going to fix up your life, or that He'll compensate you for what you have lost. No, redemption means that He steps into your life to rescue you—not just your present, but your future, your soul. His plan is to redeem you.

We are a more desperate Ruth. And just as Ruth says to Boaz, we say to Jesus, "You are the redeemer." And God has given us an even better Boaz. Because Jesus is God, He knew us before we were born, because He created us. And then He became like us. He became human. And in that way, He became our kinsman. And then He lived the perfect life that we couldn't live, and He died the death that we should've died. And He did that in our place. And in that way, He became our Redeemer. He's our kinsman-redeemer.

And the story of Ruth, the story of the Bible, the story of the Gospel, is that you and I are more sinful than we can possibly imagine. And yet, because of what Jesus has done, we are more loved and accepted than we could dare to hope.

Jesus is our Redeemer. And at the end of our story, there's a wedding. In each of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—Jesus refers to himself as the groom. He says, "I am the groom." And we're His bride.

Romans 8:35, 37-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our King.

The Church, Christians throughout time and around the world, are the bride of the King. And Scripture tells us, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or

distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rules, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our King.”

Those are wedding vows. Those are our wedding vows. They’re for our present and our future. And do you know what the best part is? There is no “Till death do us part.” Because even death won’t separate us. Because in Christ we have life. He’s our King, we are His bride. And in Him, we’re redeemed.

And so, let’s take this truth of redemption. Let’s take this truth that God has a plan for redemption and press it into our lives. And let’s let it shape how we pray. Let’s pray as people who believe in those marriage vows. Let’s pray as people who believe in our souls to our core that nothing can separate us from our groom.

So, as you pray this week, begin or end your time in prayer by reminding yourself: *Jesus, nothing can separate me from Your love. Nothing can separate me.*

So often I spend my time in prayer asking, asking for something—asking God to change my circumstances, asking Him to bless me in some way, asking Him why. I spend a lot of time asking of God. Perhaps trusting that God has a plan for redemption means that I become someone who doesn’t just pray asking for, but that I become someone who prays trusting in. And I trust in Him, and I trust in His plan in my life, even when I can’t see it. But I trust in Him, knowing that nothing can separate me from Him.

Some of you know the story of Joni Eareckson Tada. As a teenager she was a gifted athlete. She loved playing tennis, she was on her high school swim team. And one day she went swimming with her friends. She misjudged the depth of the water, and when she dove in, she actually hit her head. And in an instant there was a crack, and then she describes a tingle down her spine, and then nothing. And from that moment and for the next sixty years, she has never moved any part of her body from her shoulders down. She suffered life-altering loss.

And over the years she’s struggled with living in a wheelchair and being fully dependent on other people for basic needs. She’s described the loss of her hopes and her dreams and her vision for what life would be. But she never grew bitter. In fact, till this day she’s an incredibly

hopeful person. Because Joni Eareckson Tada knows Jesus. She knows that He is her Redeemers.

On earth the underside of the tapestry is messy, tangled, and unclear; but in Heaven, we will stand amazed to see the topside of the tapestry and how God beautifully embroidered each circumstance of our lives into a pattern for our good and His glory.

--Joni Eareckson Tada

And in one of her books she writes this: “On earth the underside of the tapestry is messy, tangled, and unclear; but in Heaven, we will stand amazed to see the topside of the tapestry and how God beautifully embroidered each circumstance of our lives into a pattern for our good and His glory.”

Jesus has redeemed us. And one day He will redeem even what seemed irredeemable. Because the Bible tells us that on the day we meet Him face to face there will be no more death, no sickness, no mourning, no loss. Jesus will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And He will be with us and we will be with Him forever. And He’ll show us the tapestry that He was weaving with our lives the entire time. And we will finally see in all of its glory His plan for redemption.

Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we come before You, and we are humbled by who You are, that You would choose to love us. God, help us to remember today, this week, for the rest of our lives, that nothing can separate us from Your love. God, we pray that as we navigate difficulty in life—difficult situations or despair or loss—God, we pray that we would know that You are still God and we are still Yours; that You have a plan even if we can’t see it.

God, I pray for us today, that we would be people who would live and walk and follow You, trusting that You have a plan. Help us to do that, Father.

We pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.