

This morning I want us to concentrate on a story which has great significance to us – that is to everyone – great significance for all of us today. We’re going to look briefly at the story of Ruth. It’s a wonderful little story, noteworthy of course for its content – otherwise it would have no place in the Bible - but firstly for where it is **placed** in the Bible. We find Ruth nestling between the books of Judges and 1 Samuel. Easy to miss, easy to skip over. But it reminds us again that we mustn’t disregard the Old Testament. The book of Ruth is a gem.

In Judges we read of the ups and downs of the people of Israel, God’s chosen people in the days after they have moved out of Egypt and into the land God had promised them. Judges is a book telling of battles won and lost depending on the leader’s obedience to God. The last verse in the book of Judges reads: *‘In those days Israel had no king and everyone did as he saw fit.’*

Following the book of Ruth we have 1 Samuel where we saw the last time I preached, you’ll remember (I hope!) that Israel were **still** rejecting God and wanted a human king to lead them. More battles.

So the short story of Ruth comes as a terrific contrast to those books, a very welcome interlude, and gives hope because, as you will see, it is a book of gracious love and touching devotion. If it weren’t for stories like this one, it would be tempting to think that these Israelites were a rotten lot, wouldn’t it?

It’s a gem of a story, and there is so much to be learnt from it. And it’s of great importance because of the people we meet here. Matthew’s gospel tells us in chapter 1:5, that Ruth was King David’s great grandmother, and as we know of course that humanly-speaking Jesus comes directly from the line of David. So this is an important little story we’re talking about here.

Time doesn’t permit us to study all this book has to teach us, but I would encourage you to go away and read the whole story, because rightly understood, it’ll warm your heart, but also it will warm your **spiritual** heart because it also tells us of the workings of the heart of God. So that’s **your** Sunday afternoon sorted out!

When I was a teenager I used to read newspapers from the back, because like most young boys, I was more interested in the football at the back than the news at the front.

I want to start by reading from chapter 4, when the story is nearly done. I want us to focus in on Boaz. He is the man who eventually marries Ruth. There! I've spoilt the story! Oops! [Read Ruth 4:1-10]

I want us to look at Boaz because he has important things to tell us as we prepare to take the bread and the wine a little bit later. We're focusing on Boaz, before we focus on one of his descendants, Jesus. My prayer is that through looking at Boaz, it will help us to understand Jesus better.

But we must firstly set the scene, and explain the background:

We read in chapter 1 that there was a severe famine in Israel, and in order to escape it a man called Elimelech and his wife Naomi took their two sons to the country of Moab. Elimelech died, but his two sons married Moabite girls, one of them being Ruth. But within ten years both the sons died as well, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law. Naomi heard that the famine in Israel was now over and decided to return to her home in Bethlehem. Ruth is devoted to her husband's mother, and although she is a foreigner, she says in 1:16, *'Where you go, I will go, and where you will stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God.'* So they return together.

In chapter 2 we find Ruth out in the fields. Now in those days in Israel they made provision for the widows and the poor – a bit like the modern welfare system, where the poor can apply for various benefits to help them survive. Ruth was now living in a country where widows were often ignored, poverty-stricken – they led very difficult lives. So in Israel, when the fields were harvested, the workers would purposely leave the corners of the field, and any grain that was dropped was left for the poor to glean. In this way it was recognised that God was providing for all his people.

It's while Ruth is gleaning grain that she notices, and is noticed by Boaz. Boaz is introduced as a man of standing in chapter 2, verse 1 – he was wealthy – and he is clearly a God-fearing man: in verse 4 he greets his workers with *'The Lord be with you!'* and when he hears Ruth's story of how she has been loyal to Naomi, he says in verse 12b *'May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'*

Boaz is kind and generous to Ruth and he even tells his workers to throw more grain Ruth's way. He goes further than the laws required by having the harvesters deliberately drop grain in Ruth's path.

Was it just coincidence that Ruth just happened to be in this field? I think not. God has his purposes. Was it a coincidence that it was Boaz' field that she was gleaning in?

Well, when Ruth tells Naomi about what has happened, Naomi is in no doubt whatsoever that God has worked this situation out for their good and for his purposes. She says in verse 20, ‘ “*The Lord bless him!*” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “*The Lord has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.*” She added, “*That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.*” ’

Naomi sees that God has provided help for them, he's provided food for them, but he has also provided rescue for them out of their plight because Boaz is one of their kinsman-redeemers.

Before we go any further, we need to understand what this means – the kinsman-redeemer.

Admit it – when you read the newssheet, who thought that the title for this morning's talk was to do with football? And who thought Derek had made a spelling mistake when he printed it off? How could you think that?!

No, the Hebrew for kinsman-redeemer is *goel*. (Apologies to Hebrew speakers if I'm pronouncing it wrong.) What does this term *goel* mean?

In Deuteronomy chapter 25 we read of the responsibility of the family if a man dies without children. His brother is to marry the dead man's widow, and the first son they have is to carry on the name of the dead brother, ‘*so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.*’ [Deut.25:5-6] The family have an obligation to continue the dead man's name and inheritance.

In special circumstances of need, the *goel*, the kinsman redeemer can buy back land which the widow has had to sell to survive; he can also buy back a person, if they have become so destitute that they have had to sell themselves into slavery. This was a provision, a responsibility, an obligation so that the inheritance would not be lost to the family.

And of course this all springs from the covenant relationship of Israel with God – they are **his** people, they are living on land **God has given** them. That should never change.

So the family unit is bound together, and the *goel*, the kinsman-redeemer has the responsibility to restore the dead man's name and inheritance.

Coming back to our story, this is what Naomi sees in Boaz, when she says *'he is one of our kinsman-redeemers,'* in chapter 2. Now she sees God's provision – perhaps he will bring hope, protection and a secure future to Naomi and Ruth, and preserve the name and inheritance of their family. She hatches a plan, which is worked out in chapter 3. Naomi tells Ruth to lay at Boaz' feet one night, indicating that she wants him to be the kinsman-redeemer. So will Boaz be the *goel*?

Well, all goes well for a while, but there is a snag; in verse 12 of chapter 3 he says, *'Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I.'* - there's another man who is a closer kinsman and so **he** should become the kinsman-redeemer. But Boaz promises swift action to solve the situation, and so finally we reach chapter 4, and the passage we read earlier.

Let's recap what we've seen about Boaz so far - we have seen that he is a much respected man of standing in chapter 1; he is godly in his speech to his workers in chapter 2, not afraid to speak of spiritual matters; he is obedient to God's word in making provision for the poor and needy by letting them glean grain; he recognises Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and to God although she is a foreigner, and so he is kind and extra generous to her; he is a man of his word in chapter 3 – he promises swift action, and the very next day we see him sorting out the situation.

Praiseworthy attributes – the marks of a life touched by God – do we see any of them in our own lives? Remember, when God is part of our life the fruit of the Spirit should be increasingly more and more evident in our lives – *'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,'* Paul reminds us in the letter to the Galatians. The changed and changing life that will witness to those around us, as Pastor has been mentioning the past couple of weeks.

Chapter 4. Boaz is determined to sort out Naomi and Ruth's precarious situation. He seeks out the nearer kinsman-redeemer and puts it to him. In verse 3 he says, *'Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. 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 that I will know. For no-one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.'* 4

Firstly we see that there is an urgent need for a kinsman-redeemer. Naomi and Ruth are in desperate need. They are poor and destitute. Naomi is having to sell off family land so that they can survive. There is no other way. Rights of widows such as them were minimal, and although Boaz was kind in letting them glean grain in his fields, this was just not enough for them. They need to sell off land, and who knows, perhaps they will both have to become someone's slaves. So there is a real need, and Naomi, Ruth and Boaz all see that there must be urgent action.

Secondly this redemption will cost – there is a price to pay. That is why Boaz is consulting with this closer kinsman-redeemer, to see if he is willing to pay the price to redeem Naomi and Ruth. It was a business transaction, that's why Boaz makes sure he has witnesses to the deal. The redeeming of Naomi and Ruth will require payment so that can be released from their predicament. There's a price to pay.

Boaz says, *'If you will redeem it, do so,'* and to begin with, the kinsman says straight away in verse 4, *'I will redeem it.'* He's very happy to pay the relevant price for the land, Naomi is past child-bearing age, and so it's worth spending some cash to buy back the land, because the land will come back to his descendants. Money well-spent. Sorted. *'I will redeem it.'*

But then Boaz mentions additional considerations in verse 5; *'On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.'* Now the kinsman is not so sure. Using some of his inheritance to pay for land which would come to **his** family was a good deal; but as well as that to marry Ruth – a foreigner, and who could still bear children – in fact that would be his **obligation**, he would be expected to produce an heir to carry on the dead man's name – this would mean that he would be **losing** whatever it cost him to redeem the land, Naomi and Ruth.

It would be too costly for him to redeem the land, have to marry Ruth and produce an heir, and to have the mother-in-law as well! (No mother-in-law jokes, please!). So he says, verse 6, *'Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.'* The price was too high – he couldn't pay the cost. Music to Boaz' ears! The way is open for him to become Ruth and Naomi's kinsman-redeemer.

There was a need, but there was a high cost, a price to pay.

Thirdly then, redemption needs **someone willing and able to pay the price** for the need, willing and able to act as kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz is that someone. He is able to pay – we have seen that he is a man of standing, he is wealthy, he owns land and he has men working for him. It has to be a kinsman who does the redeeming – it has to be a member of the dead man’s family. Again, Boaz qualifies. So he is well able to pay the price of Naomi and Ruth’s redemption. But is he willing? Sometimes **we** are **able** to do the right thing, but we are **unwilling** because of the cost to us, either in monetary terms or in terms of our wellbeing. Is Boaz willing to be their kinsman-redeemer? You bet he is!

This is a love story. Boaz notices Ruth and is taken by her the first time he sees her. He loves her. We read in chapter 3, verse 10, *‘The Lord bless you, my daughter, ... This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.’* We get the impression that Boaz is more elderly, because he thanks Ruth for her kindness – she could have attracted any man, but she turns her back on youth, and wants Boaz to marry her because it’s the right thing to do according to the law of the God she has come to trust.

Boaz has welcomed Ruth – a non-Israelite – into God’s family. He loves her, he wants to rescue her by marrying her. He **is** willing to pay the price. In front of witnesses he announces in verse 9, that he will redeem Naomi’s property, and he will marry Ruth and will provide an heir to maintain the name of the dead.

Result! There is a need for redemption, there is a price that will have to be paid, and providentially there is a kinsman-redeemer who is willing and able to pay that price.

(334 There is a redeemer, Jesus God’s own Son)

This is the whole point of what we’re thinking about this morning and what we’ll be remembering as we come around the Lord’s table in a few moments; there is a Redeemer, Jesus, God’s own Son.

The story of Boaz and Ruth points forward to what Jesus did for us – it’s a love story – God loves the world, He loves people, He doesn’t want any to perish, and that’s why He did what He did through Jesus.

Like we saw with Naomi and Ruth, there is an urgent need – Genesis tells us that man was made in God’s image, made to be in relationship with Him, to enjoy Him, to rule over His creation on earth. But man blew it! We blew it! We decided we didn’t want to do things God’s way, we wanted to be in charge of everything without reference to God.

Isaiah 53 verse 6 says, *‘We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way;’* it is part of our human nature to want to reject God and go our own way. We are God’s creation, but we became lost property, we became slaves to sin. Ephesians says that we became dead in our transgressions and sins, Colossians says in chapter 1 verse 21, *‘You were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.’* We were lost, and if we are still persisting in our sins, in other words refusing to recognise God in our lives, we are still dead, we are still alienated from God. Romans 6:23 says, *‘The wages of sin is death’* .

There was and still is an urgent need – someone had to do something. We needed to be redeemed – bought back from the power of sin and its punishment of death. Someone needed to be able and willing to redeem us.

Luke’s gospel tells us that Jesus, *‘The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’* Luke 19:10.

We remember from Ruth’s story that not just anyone could be the redeemer, it had to be a kinsman. Likewise with Jesus. The eternal Son of God took on flesh, he became man. Our redemption could only be carried out by a perfect human, and only God could become a perfect human. Hebrews tells us that *‘For this reason he had to be made like his brothers [he had to share their humanity] in order that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.’* Hebrews 2:17. Jesus became our kinsman, by being born as a babe, living as a man, sharing our humanity. Jesus – the Son of God, yet also perfect man – was the **only one** able to be our perfect kinsman-redeemer.

He is **able** to be our Redeemer from sin because he is the Son of God; He is **willing** to be our Redeemer, because He loves us.

Well, what about the price? Boaz was willing to pay the cost of redemption to rescue Naomi and Ruth – what about our redemption from sin?

1 Corinthians 6:20 says, *‘You were bought at a price.’*

Mark 10:45 tells us that Jesus, *'The Son of Man, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'* Jesus paid the price of our redemption with his very life. The price for setting us free from sin, was the death of the Son of God. The letter to the Ephesians reminds us that *'In Him, [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood.'* Ephesians 1:7.

God saw our need of redemption – we needed to be rescued from our slavery to sin and death, its ultimate punishment. Jesus was able and willing to identify with us by becoming man, living on earth. He alone, the Son of God, was able to become our perfect kinsman-redeemer, He was willing to pay the price. He paid with His life. Jesus died a cruel death on the Cross to rescue us – you and me - from the effects of sin.

Psalm 130:7,8 says this, *'O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with Him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.'* We have the benefit of living **after** Jesus, and we can see that he **has** provided full redemption, he **has** redeemed us from all our sins.

Thomas Watson said “Great was the work of creation, but greater the work of redemption; it cost more to redeem us than to make us; in the one there was but the speaking of a word, in the other the shedding of blood.”

What a great *goel!* What a great Redeemer!