

Ruth: The family and the Family

Ruth 4:13-22

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

We come this morning to the close of the short and delightful book of Ruth. Ruth has proposed, Boaz has accepted and promised to fulfill the role of redeemer. And, after dealing with the rights of the nearer-in-line kinsman, in last week's text, the marriage, as a matter of civil law, was finalized, with witnesses, and the blessing of the elders and the community.

Today we will look at the fruit of this marriage both in the clan of Elimelek, the family of Naomi and Boaz and Ruth, that is family with a lower-case F on your outline. And we will look at the fruit of this marriage for the family of God and even the human family, family with a capital F on your outline.

I. The family

First, then, family with a lower-case f. Ruth 4, verse 13: So, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Here the marriage is consummated. Boaz the redeemer also seeks to be the levir, the one who raises up offspring for Elimelek and his son, Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband. And the text says: "The Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son." This is only the second time in the book that the Lord is said to act. The first was way back in chapter 1, with Naomi still in Moab, when we were told that the Lord had visited his people by breaking the famine, and providing bread for them.

The Lord acts, then, for plenty and progeny, for land and seed, to restore the barrenness of the land, and to give to Ruth, barren for 10 years in Moab, a son. The story is evocative of all the barren wombs in Israel, starting with Sarah, through Hannah, down to Elizabeth. The Lord gives conception out of barrenness, and that is a picture, a foretaste, of the Virgin Birth of Christ. And by that birth, God resurrects the world out of the barrenness of sin and death. But here, this birth, is a kind of resurrection of this family line.

And, thus, this is a cause for great celebration. The women, in v.14, said to Naomi. Evoking the women of Bethlehem here brings us full circle. They are the ones who greeted Naomi on her return from Moab. And they heard Naomi tell them to call her, Mara, bitter, because the Almighty had made her life very bitter.

She went away full, but the Lord brought her back empty. And so, we see the narrative pattern: from famine to fulness, from bitterness to joy. This is the design of God in the depth of our darkness and our trials. The women said: Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without redeemer. This is the beginning of the answer to the prayer of the people, at the gates for Boaz and Ruth:

May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

Notice the women say that “this day the Lord has not left YOU – Naomi – without a son.” And in v.17 they will say: “Naomi has a son!” It’s Ruth’s baby, but he is the redeemer for the whole extended clan of Elimelek. And note: The Lord has not left you – Naomi – without a redeemer. Boaz is a redeemer, but now the narrative shifts to a future redeemer, a future kinsman for Naomi. And the women then pray the same blessing, they pronounce the same benediction, that the elders pronounced on Boaz. “May he become famous throughout Israel.”

This may be boilerplate, standard conventional religious language, but the women’s prayer/wish shifts the narrative to the future, where the redeemer’s greatness will be fully revealed. This child, they continue, will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Through this child, Naomi will experience God’s hesed as nourishing, life-giving, renewal from barrenness, from death without hope of an inheritance in the land.

Then the women heap extraordinary praise on Ruth, the mother of this child: For your daughter-in-law, who loves you (hesed again) and who is better to you than seven sons. An amazing thing to say in the Jewish, male-dominated world. These women, remember, ignored Ruth in chapter 1 – the two women came walking into town – and they asked can this be Naomi? And, of course, Naomi herself, in claiming that she came back empty, also ignored Ruth. Ruth now, is highly favored, greatly esteemed. Boaz and all the townspeople know of her nobility, her great worth. And the women pronounce her better than seven sons. Her faith has been Abrahamic in leaving her home country, and Marian (Mary) in her commitment, her placing herself fully at the disposal of the Lord.

And now Ruth, the Moabitess, is, through a divine gift of conception, the mother of the redeemer. And the women name the child Obed, which means servant. For the redeemer must sacrificially serve the redeemed, even, as we saw in Boaz, at great cost.

Now, the book could end right there, and the story would have a certain completeness. But we are told that Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Then the author backs up and gives us a fuller genealogy beginning in v. 18.

II. The Family

This brings us to the second point, the Family, with a capital F. Now this might seem a strange, even anti-climactic, ending to this story. After all, genealogies are boring to most folks, and they often just skip them. I taught a bible study years ago on the book of Genesis, which is loaded with genealogies. And one of the guys at the study would always plead with me – in a good-natured way – to please skip the genealogies. But I went over every name in every list, because to the Hebrew people these lists are critical – and since they are our fathers/mothers, our ancestry.com, these lists should matter to us as well.

But this list, THIS list, this one really matters. It is THE most important point of the Book of Ruth. It is almost surely the reason this book is in Holy Scripture, and it has a great deal to teach us. It begins with Perez. For reasons we mentioned last week, Perez is important. He is the offspring of Judah and another (surely) foreign woman, Tamar. In a context where Tamar's husband had died, and she was seeking a levir (a redeemer) to provide offspring. Everyone in this story is a Perezite. So, he is sort of the prominent ancestor of the clan.

The list here has ten generations. A number of fulness, or completion (Noah/Abr.). And by that stylistic point alone, it tips us off that something momentous is happening. Much like Matthew's gospel breaks the genealogy of Jesus up into three sets of fourteen generations – each bracketing a crucial era: From Abraham to David (14), from David to the Babylonian exile (14), and from the Exile to Christ (14).

So here, after ten generations, we get to David. The book is, in many ways, about getting to David. We learned at the very beginning of Ruth that it took place in the days of the judges. Days, we are told in Judges, when there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. The book is part of the royal backstory of David's ancestors, though they, of course, did not know it. Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, is the grandfather of King David. Ruth, the Moabitess, is the great-grandmother of King David. And more than that, being ancestors of David, means they are ancestors of Christ, our kinsman redeemer. And Christ's genealogy in Matthew, makes the role of the women – hidden in this genealogy here in Ruth – Matthew makes them visible. Judah is the father of Perez by Tamar. Salmon is the father of Boaz – you see that in our text in v. 21 – but Matthew adds: Salmon is the father of Boaz BY RAHAB. Boaz's mother is Rahab we now learn, and it's hard not to see how that would not have given Boaz a generous openness to foreign, outsider women.

And, Matthew continues, Boaz is the father of Obed, by RUTH. Boaz and Ruth are ancestors of David AND David's greater Son, the Redeemer who secures and confers their and our everlasting inheritance. From a human, historical point of view then, we can say this: No famine, no flight to Moab; No flight, no return of Ruth; no death of Mahlon, no widowed Ruth; no widowed Ruth, no marriage to

Boaz; No marriage to Boaz, no Obed; no Obed, no Jessie; no Jessie, no David; no David, no human ancestry of Jesus Christ. So, this Obed, this servant, points ahead to not only to David, but to THE servant of the Lord, the suffering servant, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

This genealogy then, forces one to see the whole story in new light. Let's talk about this because I think it's very practical. It affects how we think and live. First, think about this book for a moment. Overall, it's pretty mundane. There are no miracles. There is no divine revelation given to anyone. It's mostly about widows and land and gleaning and family ties. With some understated relational dynamics thrown in. It takes place in a small town. There are no kings or queens or great people, no real movers and shakers at all in the story. No many wise, not many powerful. Just ordinary decent people trying to live, to deal with awful blows and setbacks, bitter losses and dark providences. Trying to get their bearings, and follow God faithfully. And they can't see what we see. They can't even see ahead to David, much less to Christ. But in and through these ordinary people – people like you and me – and their ordinary lives. Often as boring and mundane as a genealogy. God is at work. Often against all sense perception, sometimes it seemed against all reason and goodness. Yet, now these three people – Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz – are woven deeply into the tapestry of the world's redemption.

Let me conclude with four points which, I think, can serve as a practical summary of what we can take from the book.

First, the gift of Obed to the family, small f, of Naomi, matters only because that family is part of the family of David, and ultimately of Christ and the family of the redeemed. The family with a capital F. To miss this is to turn our own families into idols. For us in the NT, baptism is the crucial event here. Baptism means we die, and if we die, then our narratives die, then our families, small f, are displaced from center stage. The story of Jesus, the Son of David is the central controlling story, it is THE narrative of the world. Not Ruth and Boaz's, and not our stories.

We are, as Ruth and Boaz were, significant because God, in his hesed, gathers up our little lives – in our all frailty and sin, and nobility - into his grand purposes in securing a people, in a land, in Jesus, the seed of David, the seed of Abraham, our kinsman. That is what the genealogy teaches us here. We have died. Our lives, our narratives are hidden with Christ in God, when Christ appears, then, and not before, will we and our lives be revealed in glory. This is a great comfort in the midst of the confusions, the untidiness of life. Your story matters, not because you can make sense of it, but because Jesus gathers you and your lower-case f, family, up into himself and his upper-case F family.

Second, this means we see through a glass darkly in this life. Remember, we said earlier in the series, and this is something the genealogy indicates – providence is like Hebrew words – it can only be read backwards. Only when we

get to David, and finally to Christ, can we see something of the broader purposes, the rich and deep hesed, of God in the tragedies that befell Naomi and Ruth. Of course, they tasted this kindness, this hesed, in their own lives, but how it all fit and what it all meant, and why they had to suffer – that mostly, if not entirely, eluded them, as it usually does for us.

And that brings me to the third point. There is an incompleteness – and a mystery - to life, and to all our stories until David's greater Son, our Redeemer comes again in glory and wipes every tear from our eyes. Naomi lost a husband and two sons. She doesn't get them back in this story. There is no final accounting, no neatly tied up narratives in this life. One could say this story has a happy ending. But the genealogy tells us the happy ending is neither the fulness of happiness, nor the ending of endings. When Christ appears in glory, then, and not before, will we appear with him in glory.

Fourth and Finally, both Boaz and Ruth should stand as examples for us, and we should seek to imitate them. Boaz, in his sacrificial generosity, his love of and obedience to the law, but his willingness to freely go beyond the letter of the law, pictures for us the work of Christ, our kin, and our redeemer. Ruth's loyalty to both Israel's God, and Israel's people (Naomi) is a model of "all in" Christian discipleship, of vowed commitment. Ruth, Boaz told us, has sought refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. That same God, those same wings, would hover over, would overshadow Mary, and cause her to bring forth Ruth's human descendant, Jesus of Nazareth.

Who knows what God will do if we take refuge under the shadow of his wings? It may not be dramatic, but we do know that in Jesus, Ruth and Mary's offspring, our ordinariness gathered up... and the individual, isolated details of our lives are given a dignity, and an enduring quality – one that echoes down through generations and into eternity. He secures our names, our identities, our land, our place as his enduring offspring, his children. Praise be to the God of Israel who has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. Amen.

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