

## **A Decision. A Sandal. A Destiny.**

### **Ruth 4:1-12**

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There is a movement in today's culture is to simplify your life. Reduce stress and chaos. You will find many books on the topic – both Christian and secular. For example consider these book titles: “Simplify your Spiritual Life” – or “Simplify your Time” – or simply – “Simplify your Life.”

Now, I am all for a simple life – it is a needed corrective in our overly cluttered culture. But, I wonder, if like me – you find that often times instead of life getting more simple - it gets more complex. I mean, I I want to fit everything in to the proverbial Tupperware containers of my life - but the Lord seems to keep bringing in new messy stuff into my life – and I say “Lord this doesn't fit into what I had planned.” For me, it seems, God may not be interested in keeping my life simple.

In Jim's Pence's book *Blind Sight*, Thomas Kent did not need any more mess in his life - but in college he had made a covenant with a group of friends – that they would help one another in their times of need. He got a message from one of those friend – whom he had not thought about in years – but the e-mail came and read: “Save My Children!” Remember the promise... Urgent package arriving DFW at 8:30 tonight, Baggage Area 9. Please pick up and deliver... My children's lives are at stake. Please don't let me down!” How did he respond? The author wrote: A swell of anger surged up inside Thomas. His life was messed up enough already. He didn't need anyone complicating things!”

So often that is how *I feel* when God brings new challenges into my life. Can you relate to this? There goes my simple life. There was a man in Israel 3,000 years ago who could certainly understand this. He received a message from a distant relative *he* had not thought of in years. The note was not “Save my Children” – but “Save my Family.” The man looked at the name on the note

and thought: “Messy.” He didn’t really want to get involved, but he was the closest relative and he knew there were expectations. As he walked to the town gate he wondered how he could turn this into a win-win.

That is the person we are going to meet today as we continue in our study in the book of Ruth. Last week we explored Naomi’s Surprising Plan – which resulted in a marriage proposal from Ruth to Boaz – but then we learned that a closer redeemer existed – and today we will learn the rest of the story. The question today is whether he will redeem or not. Let’s begin with verses 1-2 – the location of our story today:

## **Exposition of the Text**

### **Location – The City Gate (4:1-2)**

“Now Boaz went to the gate and sat down there” (4:1) – Why did Boaz go to the gate? In a walled city the town gate was the main place of activity. The gate area in Israelite cities was an open space that was the hub of activity. Merchants, visitors, messengers and judges all frequented that area and conducted their business there. It was a logical place to find someone you might be looking for. - *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p.280.

And Boaz does find who he was looking for: “And behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down.” (4:1). Here we have a literary device that we want to observe. Regarding the closer redeemer my translation reads: “turn aside friend.” “Friend is the translation in both the NASB and the NIV. The King James calls him “such a one.” The Jewish translation calls him “so-and-so,” and the new Net Bible calls him “John Doe.”

What is going on here? The close relative does not have a name – Boaz has a name, Ruth as a name – even Orpah had a name – but this man has no name. I mean – he had a name, of course –

and certainly Boaz knew his name. But the name is not preserved in the story by the author. Instead he is called in Hebrew: *Peloni Almoni*, which means “A Certain Someone.” It is like when you say to your friend – Remember – what’s his name? So-and-so? So why does the author here choose not to record his name – think about that as we continue.

Next Boaz **He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. (4:2)** 10 elders are called in. Their role not really going to be as judges – they are not a jury, but rather they are witnesses to the decisions that will be shortly made. Now in verses 3-10 we turn to the decision on whether to redeem or not to redeem.

### **To Redeem or Not to Redeem (Ruth 4:3-10)**

And Boaz gets right to business: **“Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.’”**

Note a couple things. First we are a little surprised that the issue brought up is about land – we didn’t really know Naomi needed to sell land. Also Boaz does not mention anything about the marriage. But, Ok – we will start with a real estate matter. This is certainly a normal part of a redeemer’s job description – Lev. 25:25 reads: **‘If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman (goel / redeemer) is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.**

Here is our first theological lesson about redemption: **“Redeemers Respond to Desperate Needs.”** We are reminded that the story of Ruth unfolds out of a situation of great need – we have had tragic death, widows, poverty and a family line about to become extinct. It is messy. And

redeemers respond to desperate needs. Throughout the Old Testament, God is presented as the redeemer of His people. Psalm 103 – Bless Yahweh who “redeems your life” from where? The pit, then – “he crowns you with hesed and compassion.” God is a redeemer, because his people are so often falling into pits – they need help! Boaz and the closer relative are called upon as redeemer to meet the need of those who are in need.

So the closer relative says, “I will redeem it.” (4:4). I will meet that need! On one hand we celebrate these words – on the other hand these are not the words we wanted to hear, because we want *Boaz* to be our redeemer in this story. But the closer kinsman has little reason to object to this redemption. For a good price, he gains additional land for farming – Naomi is not going to have any other children and so this land will remain with him and his children. It is what a “win-win”. He becomes a hero by helping his poor relations, and he gains financially.

But Boaz is a shrewd negotiator – he links the purchase of the land with marrying Ruth: “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” It is a two for one – Both must be redeemed.

At this point let me explain something in that culture called Levirate marriage. The background is in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. Let’s look at it briefly: “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. “And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel. Deut 25:5-6. It seems an extremely odd practice to us - but the simple purpose of Levirate marriage was to prevent a family name from going extinct - one of the major problems of the book of Ruth.

Now let me give you my opinion on how everything is working at this point in the story. First, we have Boaz and the closer relative who are family redeemers with responsibilities to help. Second, we have what appears to be a reference to the Levirate marriage custom.

While interpretations vary on this point – I would like for you to consider that the marriage proposal to Ruth is neither technically a Levirate marriage, nor a required duty of a family redeemer. It doesn't fit the duties of a *goel* (redeemer)– because in Scripture the *goel*'s duties included purchasing land, relatives sold into slavery, and avenging murder; but never marriage. It does not fit neatly into the Levirate situation either – because Boaz and the kinsman are not brothers - and also the marriage is presented as voluntary. Ruth we learned could have married younger men. This is not a Levirate situation.

Here is my point – when we talk about marriage to Ruth, we are not talking about compliance to a legal responsibility, but a responsibility driven by love – by *hesed* – going above and beyond what any particular law or custom might demand.

This is the second lesson about redemption I would like us to note - **Redeemers act voluntarily, out of love.** Whoever marries Ruth will do so out of love and kindness, not out of forced duty. Fredric Bush says: The Book of Ruth does assume a family responsibility, moral not legal in nature, i.e. voluntary, in which it was incumbent upon the next of kin to marry the wife of a deceased relative and produce descendants for the deceased who will inherit his property - Such an obligation could be termed a “levirate-type” responsibility a remarkably benevolent act on the part of any more distant relation than a brother. -- Frederic Bush, WBC, *Ruth*, p.227. The closer relative has a decision to make – will he practice *hesed* and go above and beyond what is required? Will he opt for the simple life or the messy life?

The closer relative makes his choice: “I cannot redeem *it* for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem *it* for yourself; you *may have* my right of redemption, for I

cannot redeem it.” He takes a pass. To redeem the land was in his best interest – but to Marry Ruth – the land will only be his until heirs are raised up, and raising children was expensive, and they would lay claim to his inheritance – *too messy* – too costly. He made a decision, and now he takes off his sandal: Verse 7: *Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal (4:7-8).* It was in your sandal that you stood on your land and marked off its boundary. By passing his sandal – the kinsman is saying – this is too costly for me – I give it to you.

This brings up our third theological lesson which is **Redemption is Costly**. The nearer relative wanted a *discount redemption*. Redemption requires sacrifice – It involves a high payment. There is the story about the man who called up the dentist and asked, “How much is a tooth extraction?” The dentist said - \$500. The man said – what if we don’t use anesthetics? Well... said the dentist – it will be much more painful, but that would have money – I would knock \$100 off the price. Ok said the man \$400, that is still a lot – what if the work is not done by you, but an intern? “That would be good practice for them,” the dentist said – I’d knock another \$100 off. \$300 said the man – OK what if we open up the procedure to the other intern dentists as a learning experience? That would be helpful to them the dentist said if you allowed that – I would cut the price in half - \$150. OK said that man let’s do it. The dentist said, which tooth of your needs to come out and when can we schedule it. Oh – it is not my tooth said the man, I’m calling for my wife. The true redeemer does not seek a discount price – but is willing to pay the high price to meet the need.

Boaz pays the price and says, 9-10 *“You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to*

raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his *birth* place; you are witnesses today.” Notice the problem of extinction being addressed, and also that Ruth is to be Boaz’s wife. Last week Ruth offered herself as a maid – like a concubine. Now Boaz embraces her as an equal – a true wife.

So...with a decision and a sandal the closer relative sealed for himself a destiny of obscurity with no name, and Boaz a destiny of honor with his name being made great. Look at the people’s response – verse 11

### **Prayer of Blessing on Boaz and Ruth**

All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “*We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah* (the mother’s of Israel – whose 12 sons made up the 12 tribes) *both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem* (May Boaz’s name become great and well known for his *hesed*). *Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez* (The mother of the tribe of Judah – Boaz’s tribe) *whom Tamar bore to Judah* (another situation where they faced extinction of a family line), *through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.*”

This brings up our fourth lesson – that **God rewards acts of hesed**. We have seen this throughout the book. Chapter 1:8-9: Naomi said to Ruth and Orpah – May the Lord bless you – because of your *hesed* to me. Chapter 2:12: Boaz said to Ruth – May the Lord reward your work – because of your *hesed*. Chapter 3:10 Boaz prays for blessing on Ruth for her *hesed*, and the people shout. May the Lord bless you greatly. God delights in rewarding acts of *hesed*.

When I worked in HR I was responsible for our compliance to Federal wage and hours laws. We talked about what is “compensable” and what is “non-compensable” to make sure people were

paid fully. Do you want to live a life of eternal destiny? A life worthy of note. Then - live a life of hesed – It is something God delights in rewarding - in this life and the next. We will see that especially next week, as we conclude this book.

### **Christ the Perfect Redeemer:**

Of all the chapters in the book of Ruth, chapter four most clearly turns our attention to Christ. Over the centuries of the church, Boaz has often been compared to Jesus Christ – and the comparison is not without merit.

For example, we have learned that *Redeemers respond to desperate needs*. There was no need more desperate than our enslavement to sin. The Apostle Paul said, “Jesus gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed... We have learned that, *Redeemers act voluntarily, out of love*. The one thing that attracts us to Christ more than anything else is his love for us: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8, and like Boaz, Jesus acted out of love – voluntarily. Jesus said, “I lay down my life on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). No one forced Jesus to die for you – he chose to die, because of His deep love for you and I. We learned today that *Redemption is Costly*, Jesus was willing to fully paid the price for our sin – he took on the full punishment of God to redeem us from the punishment of sin – “He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21. We have learned that *God rewards acts of hesed*. The gospel does not end with the death of Christ, but his resurrection! Jesus’ redemption was followed by exaltation - “He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name...” - Phil 2:8-9.

Christ met our deepest needs, freely out of his love – He paid the price of sin is now exalted and sits glorified at the right hand of God.

**Application:**

As we consider a point of application, I trust you can begin to see why I titled this series, Living Above and Beyond – Living a Life of Hesed. Each week, a new act of selfless, sacrificial love has been demonstrated in front of us. This morning I want give all of us a specific challenge.

Note that all the characters in the book have one thing in common – they are related – some closely and other distant relatives. We talk about bringing the love of Christ to our neighbor, our community and our world – and indeed we must – but my question is have we brought this love to our family?

I wonder if there are some here for whom God the Holy Spirit is writing you a note that say “I want you to help \_\_\_\_\_.” Think of someone in your family. Maybe a close relative or maybe a distant relative, whom you know has a need. Maybe you have an aunt who is lonely and isolated – who needs you to show her love. Maybe you have a cousin you have lost touch with – and God is putting him or her on your heart this week to call and see how they are doing. Maybe there is a family rift, a financial need – or a need for forgiveness – or a need for confession – a member of the family who does not believe in Christ, but you sense an open door.

For some of you, this could be a pretty messy choice – it is going to cost you something – make your life a bit more complex. But aren’t you glad Boaz made that choice? Aren’t you glad Christ made that choice? Let’s pray.