

Redeeming Ruth, week 6
God's Hand in Our Redemption (Ruth 4:13–22)

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So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son.

— Ruth 4:13

The story of Ruth, one of the best-written short stories of all time, concludes with scenes of God's hand of providential blessing resting upon Boaz, his lovely bride Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi. The story completes its cycle from barrenness to birth, widowhood to marriage, poverty to riches, bitter to sweet, idolatry to worship, and devastation to redemption. The big idea in this section of Scripture is that piety and providence are inextricably connected. Simply, those who continue to live in holiness, trusting God to bless them, are not disappointed because in His time and by His grace God in His goodness smiles upon them.

At last we read that Boaz married his lovely wife, Ruth. As a result, she has progressed from being a mere foreigner (2:10), to a lowly servant (2:13), to a servant (3:9), and finally a beloved wife (4:13). In Ruth 1:9, Naomi prayed that God would grant Ruth a Moabite husband. But God in His kindness answered her prayer in an exceedingly generous way—granting Boaz as Ruth's husband, a man who was "worthy" (2:1) of respect, honor, and imitation as one of the most outstanding men the world has ever known.

For the first time, Boaz and Ruth enjoyed the gift of marital intimacy as husband and wife. Perhaps on their first night together, God blessed their union by enabling Ruth to conceive a son. We see that God is indeed the author of life. Although Ruth had previously been married for ten years, she had remained childless. Here, however, the providential hand of God opened Ruth's womb, enabling her to conceive. Consequently, Ruth stands with other great women of Scripture, such as Sarah (Genesis 21:1–7), Rachel (30:22), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1–2:10), and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5–25), who conceived by the miraculous hand of God. The statement that "the LORD gave her conception" is a clear revelation that this was God's work. This statement of God's provision of a son stands with God's provision of a harvest (1:6) as the only overt declarations of God's handiwork throughout the book. Together, they serve as a thematic introduction and conclusion to the book, revealing God's invisible hand of providence at work in each line of the story.

No longer without godly friendships to support her, in verses 14 and 15 the women approach Naomi to bless and encourage their friend. Although Naomi's life had been very difficult, with a decade of hardship in Moab, the burial of her husband and sons, and the resulting impoverishment, Naomi has now been blessed by God. The women rightly see Naomi's grandson as her redeemer who will be a source of life and joy to her as a constant reminder of God's loving provision. Furthermore, the women declare the blessing Naomi has in her daughter-in-law Ruth. The women declare Ruth to be of greater value than seven sons, which is remarkable because "seven sons" is synonymous with a perfect family in Scripture (1 Samuel 2:5; Job 1:2; 42:13).

The final portrait of Naomi in the book of Ruth is one of the most moving in all of Scripture. The older woman who has shed many tears and felt much pain is finally blessed. She was bitter against God for leaving her empty-handed but now her grandson is resting on her bosom while she rubs his back and massages his head, weeping in gladness for God's faithfulness. As a young woman, Naomi was married and bore two sons, and she assumed that one day her daughters-in-law would bear her grandchildren. Despite ten long years, God did not grant her grandchildren before the death of both her sons. Although it seemed as if all hope had been lost that Naomi would ever hold a grandchild, God is indeed faithful and granted Naomi the desire of her heart. She was now a redeemed woman, protected by the proverbial wing of the great Boaz, loved by her daughter-in-law Ruth, and blessed by her chubby grandson.

In an unprecedented act, Naomi's friends seem to have named the boy "Obed," in what was possibly a prophetic utterance. Obed means servant, or worshipper, of God. This boy was promised to serve his grandmother and worship his God.

The book closes with a genealogy that at first glance appears to be an afterthought. In fact, it is one of the most important sections of the entire story. The genealogy reveals that through Ruth's redeemer-husband, Boaz, and their son, Obed, eventually comes the great king David. Furthermore, 2 Samuel 7:1-17 promises that through David will come the Redeemer of all, the Lord Jesus Christ, to establish an eternal kingdom.

Roughly a thousand years after Ruth, Matthew 1:1-17 records the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only passage in all of Scripture (apart from the book of Ruth) that mentions her name. One intriguing aspect of Matthew's genealogy is the inclusion of women, which was uncommon. Even more intriguing is the scandalous type of women who are mentioned as members of Jesus' family, namely the five women Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheeba, and Mary.

Tamar (Matthew 1:3; Genesis 38): Judah had chosen Tamar as the wife for his son Er, but Er was such a wicked man that God killed him. Judah then ordered Er's brother Onan to replace his brother and impregnate Tamar. Onan was happy to have sex repeatedly with Tamar, but refused to impregnate or marry her and so she was forced to live as a widow. Eventually her mother-in-law (Judah's wife) died, and so Tamar dressed up like a prostitute with her face covered and waited for Judah by the side of the road. Judah picked her up and had sex with her, impregnating her with twin boys. When Judah later discovered she had become pregnant by prostitution, he ordered that she be put to death. However, he cancelled that order when she revealed to him, in a great Jerry Springer plot twist, that her twin boys were his and that she was the prostitute he had sex with.

Rahab (Matthew 1:5; Joshua 1-2; 6:17; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25): Her name means "pride, insolence, savagery." She was a Canaanite, the people who were the great enemy of God and His people. Vocationally, she was a prostitute, but is best known for being a good liar. God had promised He would deliver Rahab's city of Jericho to Joshua. Joshua sent two spies from Shittim to Jericho. The spies were pursued by enemy soldiers; fortunately, Rahab hid the two men at her home, lied to the soldiers, and spared the lives of God's spies. She converted to Jehovah and was the great-great-grandma of King David.

Ruth (Matthew 1:5; Genesis 19:30–38; Ruth 1–4): She was a Moabite, an entire race that was the product of incest. The Moabite people began when Lot got drunk and had sex with his daughters. Ruth converted to Jehovah after her husband died and she became one of the godliest women in the Bible. She was King David's great-grandma.

Bathsheeba (Matthew 1:6; 2 Samuel 11): She was the beautiful woman married to Uriah the Hittite, who fought in King David's army. While Uriah was out fighting on David's behalf, David remained safe at home. He was out on his roof one day and spied Bathsheeba bathing. David was so taken with the woman that he had her brought to his residence where he seduced her. She later informed David that she was pregnant and so David conspired to put her husband on the front lines of a fierce battle and then have the other soldiers retreat so that he would be murdered. David's plan was successful and Bathsheeba the adulteress became the wife of David and mother to Solomon.

Mary (Matthew 1:16; 1:18–2:23): She was a godly teenage virgin girl from a dumpy rural town who was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. Then God spoke to her and told her she would give birth to Jesus. At first, Joseph was saddened because he understandably believed Mary had been unfaithful. But then an angel appeared to him and explained that Mary was still a virgin and that her child was the Savior, born in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Joseph obeyed the Lord, married Mary, and adopted and raised Jesus. But throughout their life, people disbelieved that Mary had been faithful to Joseph; many believed that she was a sinful and perverted liar.

Matthew was written to religious people prone to self-righteousness and the erroneous belief that they/we are less offensive to God than sinners and proverbial Moabites like Ruth. Yet by including women like Ruth in the line of Jesus, we see that Jesus is our glorious Boaz who has redeemed people from all nations and loved them like Ruth as His bride the church. The same Redeemer Jesus Christ who was at work through His invisible hand of providence in the life of Ruth today remains sovereign, good, and at work in the details of our lives, redeeming us and blessing us as He did Ruth.

Next week: Nehemiah: Building a City Within the City (Nehemiah 1:1–11a)