

Foretold

God and the Destitute

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God and the Destitute Ruth

If you have your Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to the book of Ruth. Everybody likes a good love story. You ask couples, "How did you meet? How did this whole thing come about? What is the story behind that?" We were spending a lot of time with some of the students yesterday at a conference in New Orleans, and they were asking about our story, the whole baby story. I could hear them laughing over in the distance. I thought, "Oh no, what is she telling them?" Everybody loves a good love story.

Every guy knows that you get a lot of points for renting a love story from the movie rental place. You bring it home and say, "You know, I would just like to spend some time watching a love story tonight." That is huge in a relationship. Take your wife out for a chick-flick, and you know that is big points right there. Everybody loves a good love story.

This is one of those areas where I don't think we give the Bible a lot of credit, especially in the Old Testament. We picture the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as this cold account of history that really may or may not make that much sense to us and lacks a lot of flavor; maybe it even lacks relevance in our lives. I want to debunk that perspective this morning by looking at the book of Ruth, because I'm convinced that the love story revealed in this book is deeper and more incredible than anything that Hollywood could ever come up with. Guys, I can't promise that you are going to get points from listening to this sermon this morning, but I can promise you this: That if we would grab hold of the truth behind this love story, it will change our lives. I am convinced of that.

I want us to look at the book of Ruth. I think the book of Ruth was intended originally just to be read in one setting, to sit down and see the whole picture. Now, it is possible for us to split this book up and study the different sections. It is certainly thick enough with meaning that we could spend weeks studying this book, but what I want to do is I want us to take it and just look at it as a whole, as one story. We're going to read through this story. We won't get to every single verse in the book of Ruth, but we're going to cover most of them. I want to give you a picture. I want to invite you to come in on a love story, to come in and watch this chick-flick unfold as God shows us the story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz and how it fits into His overall plan.

We'll start in Ruth 1:1. Now, just coming into the book, we have to realize that this is a unique book. There are two main reasons. Number one, it is a unique book because it is the only book in the Old Testament that is named after a non-Israelite. Ruth was not from the people of Israel. So that sets it apart. Ruth was a Gentile, as we are going to see in just a second. Second, the book is named after a woman. The only other book in the Old Testament named after a woman is Esther. Ruth and Esther are alone in that -- really in the rest of the Bible, the only two books that are named after women. So this is very unique in a lot of ways. We are going to see that uniqueness unfold.

What you have to know is the background of the book of Ruth. Joshua and Judges, those

two books, go together chronologically. Judges picks up where Joshua left off, but Ruth, the third book in this little set, actually gives us a spotlight of something that happened in the middle of the book of Judges. The setting historically is the time in Israel where there is not a king. Judges 17:6 sums it up and says, "*Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes.*" It was, basically, a very dark time in the history of Israel. A period of national disgrace, immorality, idolatry, just a very difficult time amongst the people of Israel, the people of God.

So that is what we come in to. We're going to see a light in the middle of it. Ruth 1:1 says,

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.
(Ruth 1:1-7)

The Picture of Ruth...

Now, I want us to pause there. There are a lot of people who say the main character in the book of Ruth is actually Naomi. So, I want, as we begin to look at Ruth herself, and as we focus on Ruth some, I want us to look at how she relates to Naomi. I want you to see three characteristics of Ruth, particularly in her relation to Naomi, that set the stage for the rest of the story here in Ruth 1:1-7.

A stranger from a forbidden place.

There are three characteristics of Ruth that give us a picture of who she is. Number one, Ruth is a stranger from a forbidden place. Now, I want to show you some background here. We're going to do some turning to some different points. I hope you are ready to go to both Old Testament and New Testament because, in order to grasp the richness of this text, we have to know some of the background, both before and what happens after the book of Ruth.

I want you to hold your place here and turn back to Genesis 19. I want to give you a picture. Ruth was from the country of Moab, the people of Moab. I want you to see why Moab was such a forbidden place. We see it a few different times in the first five books of the Old Testament that set the stage for the surprise factor when you see Naomi and Elimelech going to Moab of all places. Look back at Genesis 19:30. This is not one of the more glamorous stories in the Old Testament. This is how Moab came about:

Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. One day the older daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man

around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father."

That is not a pretty picture. That is exactly what they do. When you get to verse 36, listen to what it says: *"So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today."* And then it talks about the other daughter who had a son who was the father of the Ammonites. So, that was the inception of the people of Moab, through this incestuous union between Lot and one of his daughters. It is not a good foundation that was set there.

Now, turn to the right and go to Deuteronomy 23. We are going to see the relationship between the Moabites and the people of Israel and what God had to say about the Moabites. This is giving us a picture of the forbidden place that Ruth is from. Look at Deuteronomy 23:3.

"No Ammonite or Moabite [You recognize those from Genesis 19] or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live." (Deuteronomy 23:3-6)

So, God had told the people of Israel, "No Ammonite, no Moabite." This is what He said. This is the rehearsal of the law in the book of Deuteronomy. He says, *"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation."* (Deuteronomy 23:3) Don't have anything to do with them; no covenant or friendship with them whatsoever.

Let me show you one more passage. Look in Judges 3. I want you to see what the Moabites did to the people of Israel during the time of Judges. Obviously, there is a bad relationship at this point between the people of Israel and the people of Moab. They are enemies of each other. Moab ends up attacking Israel and invading Israel. Listen to what happens in Judges 3:12-14. *"Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years."* So that is the background.

When you come to the book of Ruth and you see Ruth, a Moabite, you know that, especially in her relationship with Naomi, from the people of Israel -- Naomi an Israelite -- you know there is some major conflict there. She is a stranger from a forbidden place. This is a place you do not associate with; you don't have friendship with. The law is set against them. Even down to the tenth generation, have nothing to do with the Ammonites or Moabites. She is a stranger from a forbidden place.

An outcast amidst a foreign people.

Second facet of this picture of Ruth is she is an outcast amidst a foreign people. We have already seen how this people, it was forbidden to associate with, to even be with them. Now, I want you to look at one more passage that shows the impact of these people on the people of Israel. Turn back to the left to Numbers 25. Let me show you one more instance

of the Moabites. It gives you a picture of why she would be an outcast with this Israelite mother-in-law. Look at Numbers 25. This is on the heels of three chapters which talk about how Balaam came from Moab and was pronouncing curses against Israel, and then it comes to Numbers 25, and this is the people of God preparing to go into the Promised Land.

Listen to what happens in Numbers 25:1. *"While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with..."* What kind of women? *"...Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them."* Don't miss this: Moabites were the ones who, basically, seduced Israel into worshipping foreign gods.

Therefore, when you see this picture of Naomi and Ruth together, you know that Ruth is from the forbidden place and foreign people, and therefore, she is an outcast when compared to Naomi. She is somebody you don't associate with, you don't spend a lot of time with; a stranger from a forbidden place, an outcast amidst a foreign people.

Barren with an unfulfilled purpose.

Then, you come back to Ruth 1, and you see the third characteristic of her: She is barren with an unfulfilled purpose. We saw in the verses we just read that she had married one of Naomi's sons. It says then, at the end of verse 4, *"After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband."* So, Ruth had been married to her husband for a number of years, and in that time, there is no evidence of any heir that she had. So, the family lineage she had not been able to pass on.

So, that is the picture. That is why the title, as we look at this sermon, is "God and the Destitute". This is the picture of the destitute; for Ruth to be a stranger from a forbidden place, from Moab; an outcast amidst a foreign people. She is hanging out with Naomi, but she is not a part of her people anymore, and she is certainly not included in the Israelite people. She is an outcast, and she is barren with an unfulfilled purpose. She has not fulfilled the purpose that she desires: To have a line come through her to carry on the lineage of her husband and his family. So, that is the picture that sets the stage for what happens in the book of Ruth.

I want us to go from that into seeing, not just the picture of Ruth, but the plan of God unfold. I want you to look with me at verses 8 through the rest of the chapter. Follow along at what the Bible says.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you,

because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." (Ruth 1:8-15)

The Plan of God...

God welcomes the stranger into His place.

I want us to pause here for a second. I want you to see this first facet of the plan of God in Ruth's life. Number one: God is welcoming the stranger to His place. We're going to see that unfold in two ways. First of all, what we have just read, the obstacles to faith in Ruth's life. I want you to put yourself for a second in Ruth's shoes. You are a stranger from a forbidden place, an outcast amidst a foreign people and you are barren without fulfilling your purpose. That is the picture of your life right now.

Then, you come upon Naomi. Your bitter mother-in-law is trying to persuade you to go back. Basically, there are three obstacles that we are seeing there against her faith. Number one, her background was against her. We have seen that. She's from Moab. She's from a people that are engrossed in immorality and idolatry. We see later in the Old Testament the people from Moab would literally offer human sacrifices to the idols that they have set up. They are very evil people. So her background is against her.

Second, her circumstances were against her. Feel the weight of her circumstances. Her father-in-law died. Then her husband died. Then her brother-in-law died, and she is left as a widow, and the only person that is there to support her is a very bitter mother-in-law. That is the picture. Her circumstances are completely against her. Why would she want to trust in the God of Israel at this point?

Her background is against her. She is left out because the law speaks against her. Her circumstances were against her, and then third, her family was against her. This is the surprising part of this chapter is that Naomi, a woman from Israel, is trying to persuade Ruth to go back and worship other gods. "Stay with your people, worship those other gods so you don't have to come back with me."

So, with all of these things against her, with that background, with those circumstances and with that family dissuasion against her, we are about to see one of the greatest confessions of faith throughout the Old Testament. It is an incredible picture. I want you to look at what Ruth said in verse 16. You are going to recognize these verses.

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (Ruth 1:16-17)

You recognize those verses? Sometimes, you hear those at weddings, which is an interesting context in light of this being said from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law, but it is a symbol, a picture of commitment. What a statement of faith. With all of the things that were against her, Ruth steps out and says, "I am going with you, and your God is going to my God, and your people are going to be my people, and I'm going to be in your land.

May your God," she even uses the covenant name of the God of Israel. "May the Lord deal with me be it ever so severely if anything but death separates you from me." Major faith, even amidst all of the obstacles.

And so they journey together. Look at verse 19.

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

"Don't call me Naomi, " she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. (Ruth 1:19-22)

Now, what we have is a picture of God welcoming this stranger, Ruth, into His land. Despite all of the obstacles, now we see the journey of faith. Think about it in two ways. The journey of faith, first of all, is obviously, first, a journey from Moab to Bethlehem. This is about a fifty-mile journey, which doesn't sound like it was that tough, but let me remind you, there were no four-wheel drive trucks at that point. This is two women with everything they have hiking over mountains to get to Bethlehem.

The journey is from Moab to Bethlehem, but it is much deeper than that. It is from a land of judgment named Moab to a land of promise named Bethlehem. Don't miss that. Hold on to that. God is welcoming the stranger to His land that He has promised to His people. He has brought her from a land of judgment in Moab to a land of promise in Bethlehem. God welcomes the stranger to His place. That is the first step in His plan. We're going to see how this all fits together. That is the first step.

God redeems the outcast through His person.

Second step: God redeems the outcast through His person; He redeems the outcast through His person. Now, that sentence makes absolutely no sense to us until we read Ruth 2. Let me start with you in Ruth 2:1. I want you to see how this unfolds. This is where the story really starts to get good.

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. (Ruth 2:1-3)

This is one of those coincidences in this book that just -- oh it just so happened that she happened to be in the field -- this is how all of the love stories work. You watch those love stories, and I turn to Heather and say, "That would never happen". She's in tears, and I am thinking, "That would never happen. Those details just would never work together that way,

so perfectly, that he would walk up right when she walks up." That is exactly what is happening here, and it is not fictional. It is the sovereignty of God providing for His plan to be accomplished. This is a great story.

Then it says, verse 4, you see it:

Just then [At that particular time, in walks the night in shining armor] Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!"

"The LORD bless you!" they called back.

Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" (Ruth 2:4-5)

Now, you are seeing. It is getting good. "Who is the world is that over there?" So she catches his eye. *"The foreman replied, "She is the Moabitess..."* (Ruth 2:6) Don't miss the tension as soon as that word is mentioned to Boaz. She's from the forbidden place. She's an outcast from a foreign people. *"...the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."* (Ruth 2:6-7)

"So Boaz said to Ruth..." (Ruth 2:8) He decides to take the initiative, take the first conversation.

"My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." (Ruth 2:8-9)

So, that's Boaz's pickup line. Then, she responds, *"At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground."* (Ruth 2:10) This pickup line worked well.

She exclaimed, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

"May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls."

At mealtime Boaz said to her [Date number one.], "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar."

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don't embarrass her. Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and

leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her." (Ruth 2:10-16)

He brings in his friends on the plan. Verse 17,

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" (Ruth 2:17-19)

You have to love the mother-in-law. She is starting to get a little more excited now. There is some hope in the picture. I told you it is good.

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said.

"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He 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."

Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.' "

Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else's field you might be harmed."

So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law. (Ruth 2:19-23)

Okay, now the plan of God here. God redeemed the outcast through His person. The key being what happens in verse 20. That is the crux of it because, amidst all of the trappings of the story and what goes on, we see this picture of Naomi realizing that Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer who has shown kindness.

Now, what does that mean? "He is one of our kinsman-redeemers." How does that fit into this picture? Hold your place here and turn back a couple of books to the book of Leviticus. Look at Leviticus 25. I want you to look at what God had set up. Over and over again in this particular chapter, as well as in other parts of Leviticus, redemption is mentioned. Redemption is a pretty thick word. I want you to see what it means practically here.

It says in Leviticus 25:23, *"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land."* Now here it is: *"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and..."* What? *"...redeem what his countryman has sold."*

We won't read the whole chapter, but, basically, what had been set up by God was provision, so that, if someone lost their land through poverty, that would not be an endless cycle of poverty. God didn't want this endless type of poverty amongst His people, so He set

it up so that they could “redeem”, which literally means, “buy back the land; get back the land”. A person could buy back the land, or the nearest kinsman if they were unable. In this particular instance with Ruth and Naomi, they are by themselves with no man in the picture. So, the kinsman-redeemer was someone who was able to buy back that which belonged to Elimelech and continue what had begun in his family. So, that is what it means for Boaz to be a kinsman-redeemer.

What we are seeing in Ruth 2, and in just a second when we get to Ruth 3, are two facets of a kinsman-redeemer. First of all, I want you to see the portrait of a kinsman-redeemer. I want you to see how, what we just saw in Ruth 2, unfolds this portrait. You saw in verse 20 that *“he has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.”* (Ruth 2:20) I would encourage you to circle that word “kindness”. It may be “loving-kindness”, “gentleness” or “goodness” in some of your translations. *“He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.”*

Circle that word, because it is one of the main words in the whole book. It is a great word. In the original language of the Old Testament, it is literally pronounced “*cheded*”. It is one of those Hebrew words that we just don’t have an English word that matches it. It is so thick. It literally means “loving-kindness, goodness, mercy, grace that one person shows to another.” It is exemplified in the Old Testament when one person shows favor and affection to another without expectation of anything in return; without thought of what they are going to get out of it. It is completely selfless; selfless loving-kindness – that is all summed up in one word right there in Hebrew.

That is the picture of the kinsman-redeemer. It is a word that is often used to refer to God at other points, His loving-kindness, His goodness, His grace all summed up in one. He shows His affection without expecting anything in return. That is the picture of that word. It begins our portrait of a kinsman-redeemer.

I want you to see three things that Boaz did that exemplified the picture or portrait of a kinsman-redeemer. First of all, a kinsman-redeemer seeks the outcast as his family; he seeks the outcast as his own family. Did you catch that? As soon as Boaz laid eyes on her, he said, “Who is that?” There were all kinds of other people in the field, all kinds of servant girls in the field, numerous people, and he said, “Who is that one?”

And he goes over, and he initiates a conversation there, and he says, “My daughter, listen to me.” That, even that, is a little misleading. “My daughter” is really a term of endearment; it is a term of endearment. He takes the initiative to come to Ruth. He seeks the outcast, and he says, “You have a position in my field. You come to my fields every day.” Automatically, in a matter of seconds, Ruth is now just like she is in the family, just like she is in Boaz’s household. He seeks the outcast as his family.

Second, he saves the outcast from harm. It was common for women who were working in the harvest fields to be abused or insulted by the men. He tells her -- you remember reading in verses 8 and 9, he says, “I have told the men not to touch you, to protect you.” He even says, “What you are gathering, you are not going to be embarrassed.” He tells the guys, “Leave some behind so that she can get it.” He is protecting her, saving her from any harm that would come to her. That’s why Naomi says, “Go back to that field because you know you are safe there.”

So the kinsman-redeemer seeks the outcast for his family, saves the outcast from harm and, number three, he serves the outcast at his table. Did you catch that? “Whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.” All of a sudden, she

is not this foreign outsider who doesn't have any privileges in these fields. She is able to go and drink just from where the other servant girls are. That, in and of itself, is a huge privilege.

Then, it gets even better. At meal time, they sit down, and he says, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar." All of a sudden, Ruth finds herself at the table with Boaz and, not only sitting at the table with him, but it says when she sat down with the harvesters in verse 14, he offered her some roasted grain. The word literally means "he served her". It is a great picture. The lord of the harvest serving the person that he can redeem.

What an amazing thought! There she is, he served her food, more than she could ever eat. He gives her more than enough, so she has some to take home and have later, share with Naomi. He has poured out loving-kindness and grace and mercy on her. All of this doesn't make sense. This is a foreigner from a forbidden land; a stranger who is in the middle of this distinguished man's field. He is crossing all of the boundaries and serving her at his table. He is seeking her, and he is saving her from any harm. That is the portrait of the kinsman-redeemer.

The problem comes about in Ruth 3. We are not going to read through this chapter, but just a portion of it. What is going to happen is that Naomi is going to devise a plan. The mother-in-law needs to get her hands in the thick of how this is going to work. So the mother-in-law says, "Here is what you need to do. You need to go to Boaz, you need to approach him as our kinsman-redeemer."

So, she devises a plan for her to go to Boaz. Boaz is shocked when one night he finds Ruth coming to him. I want you to hear what happens in Ruth 3:10. This is Boaz's response when Ruth comes to him: *"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier...'"* That is the same word, that kindness, the "cheeced" that we talked about.

"You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, [Now, here is the problem.] there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning." (Ruth 3:10-13)

So, here is the problem. Yes, he is the kinsman-redeemer, but he is not the closest one in line. Enter the guy in the love story that everybody hates. You just don't like to see this guy come in, but there he comes. You have a guy who is closer in kin to Ruth and Naomi, closer in kin to Elimelech's line.

After we begin to see, not just the portrait of a kinsman-redeemer, but I want you to think about the price of the kinsman-redeemer. What did you have to have or what did you have to do in order to be a kinsman-redeemer? That is where there is a guy who has more qualifications in a sense than Boaz does.

So, that is the tension that is set up to get to Ruth 4:1. We're going to see the first two facets of this price. Look at Ruth 4:1:

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-

redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "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 I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line."

"I will redeem it," he said. (Ruth 4:1-4)

Okay, not good news. What is going on? This is a picture between Boaz and Ruth, and now, this other guy is coming, and he says, "I will take the land. I am the redeemer." There we see the first two requirements of a kinsman-redeemer. The first requirement of a kinsman-redeemer is he must have the right to redeem. He must have the right to redeem and that comes through the family line, the nearest of kin. He must be as close to that person as possible through lineage. He must be like that person when it comes to their line.

He must have the right to redeem, and the second requirement is he must have the resources to redeem. In other words, he has to have the resources to be able to purchase the inheritance that is there, to buy it back. That is literally what redeemed means -- "to buy back". In order to be a kinsman-redeemer, you have to have the right to redeem and the resources to redeem. At this point, that has been put before this guy, and he says, "I will redeem it. I have the right and I have the resources. I can do it."

But that is not the only part of the kinsman-redeemer. Look at what happens after this in verse 5: *"Then Boaz said, '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.'"* So, there is more to this passage. Verse 6 says, *"At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, 'Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.'"* (Ruth 4:5-6)

You see, he had the right to redeem and the resources to redeem, but the one thing that he didn't have that is part of this whole picture of the kinsman-redeemer is he didn't have the resolve to redeem it. That is the third part of this price. You have to have the right and the resources, and you have to have the resolve. You have to have the dedication to endanger your own estate, to risk what it may cost you in order to redeem that family and that land that goes with that family. You have to have the resolve to move forward in that.

So, that is what happens after this. He says no. Starting in verse 7:

(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. (Ruth 4:7-9)

Now, I want you to see the humility and the self-effacing nature of this. "I..." A man of Israel, distinguished man, at that, a noble man. "...*have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!*" (Ruth 4:10)

So, Boaz steps up, and he says, "I have the right, and I have the resources. And most importantly, I have the resolve. I am going to redeem this family, and I am going to make Ruth my wife." You come to the climax of that picture between Boaz and Ruth and a portrait and the price of the kinsman-redeemer.

Now, what is interesting is that this word, "redemption" or "redeem", is mentioned over twenty times throughout this book. It is one of the primary themes in this book. God is showing His plan to redeem Ruth, this outcast, through this redeemer. What is interesting though is this word appears many other times in the Old Testament as well, but it is not used in the other places of the Old Testament to refer to Boaz. You know who it is used to refer to? In the Old Testament, it is used to refer to God Himself, and His relationship with His people.

Let me show you a couple instances. Go to the right in the prophets, and you will come to Jeremiah. Please turn to these passages with me and underline these passages. I want you to see the picture of God as redeemer. Jeremiah 50:33. This is God speaking to His people when they were captives, when they were outcasts in exile, when they were facing the threat of being taken slaves. Listen to what it says. This is a prophecy. Judah is going to be under the judgment of God and sent into exile.

*This is what the LORD Almighty says:
"The people of Israel are oppressed,
and the people of Judah as well.
All their captors hold them fast,
refusing to let them go.
Yet their Redeemer is strong;
the LORD Almighty is his name.
He will vigorously defend their cause
so that he may bring rest to their land,
but unrest to those who live in Babylon."* (Jeremiah 50:33-34)

It is a difficult time amongst the people of Israel, and He reminds them, "Your redeemer is strong. The one who restores, redeems, buys you back, He is strong. He will bring rest."

Go to the left one book to Isaiah 43. These are two great passages. Isaiah 43 and one in Isaiah 44. Isaiah 43:1. This is God speaking to His people as Isaiah has been telling about how the nation of Assyria is going to attack Israel and destroy. Listen to what happens in Isaiah 43:1.

*But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;*

*and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.” (Isaiah 43:1-2)*

Did you see the picture of the redeemer there seeking them out? “I summoned you by name.” He is seeking out, just as we saw in Boaz, the picture of the redeemer. Then, to save them from harm: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze because the redeemer is there for you.” Look in Isaiah 44:21. He shows them again.

*“Remember these things, O Jacob,
for you are my servant, O Israel.
I have made you, you are my servant;
O Israel, I will not forget you.
I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,
your sins like the morning mist [They are gone].
Return to me,
for I have redeemed you.”
Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this;
shout aloud, O earth beneath.
Burst into song, you mountains,
you forests and all your trees,
for the LORD has redeemed Jacob,
he displays his glory in Israel. (Isaiah 44:21-23)*

It is an exciting picture when God redeems His people. The mountains shout; they burst into song. The forest and the trees, because God has redeemed His people. That is the picture that is set up in the Old Testament.

But it is not just an Old Testament picture. Go to the right all the way to the New Testament. I want you to follow this with me. Go to Ephesians 1:4. I want you to see what Paul says about what God has done in our lives. Listen to this:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:4-8)

You get down to verse 13, and it says, “*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*” (Ephesians 1:13-14) Colossians 1:14 says the same thing.

Then, go all the way to 1 Peter. I want to show you one more in the New Testament. 1 Peter 1. I want you to listen to verses 18 and 19. Underline this, circle this word in the New Testament. Put a note by where it says “redeemer”, “Ruth”. 1 Peter 1:18-19, “*For you know*

that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." How did God redeem His people? Through His person, through the blood of Christ, the lamb without blemish or defect.

"Dave, why do you show us all of these different verses? Why do you show us Isaiah and Jeremiah?" Because I want every person in this room to know that we all stand as outcasts before the God of the universe. The law is against us. We have all broken that law. We stand before Him strangers, not deserving to even be in His presence. By His grace, He seeks you as His own. By His grace, He saves you from harm. By His grace, He serves the outcast at His table.

The picture of redeemer in Scripture is one who take the initiative and runs after His people, and that is exactly what the entire plan of God in the Bible is all about. The price of the kinsman-redeemer is great because here is the deal: God in His Son, Jesus, has the right to redeem every one of us. He has become like us. He is near to us. Not only does He have the right to redeem, but He has the resources to redeem. He has absolutely no sin in Him, absolutely no sin. Therefore, He has all the resources to redeem you and me.

Not only the right and resources, but praise be to God, He has the resolve, a resolve that drove Him to walk to the cross where He suffered and bled and died to make you, an outcast and a stranger, His sons and daughters. There is no greater love story than that; there is no greater love story than that. He pursues you. He protects you. He provides for you so that there are no strangers in the kingdom of God. We are sons and daughters. There are no outcasts, there are no orphans. We all belong in the family. There is no greater love story than that. I am thankful that there is a God that not only welcomes the stranger to His place, but He redeems the outcast through His person. See how the book of Ruth gives us a much greater picture of the person of Jesus Christ.

God blesses the barren for His purpose.

Thankfully, it doesn't even stop there. The last facet of this whole plan is that God blesses the barren for His purpose; He blesses the barren for His purpose. You come back to Ruth 4, and you see what happens at the end. Boaz stands up, he says, "She belongs to me. She is my wife." All the ladies in tears as they watch it unfold on screen.

Then, listen to what happens. Ruth 4:11-12:

Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

What do you mean offspring? This is a barren woman that Boaz just married. Well, verse 13: "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son." Who enabled her to conceive? God. God poured out His blessings. This is only the second time the author of Ruth has deliberately shown us an action of God. Everything else is more indirect. This is clear: God enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

And the women said to Naomi, who three chapters ago, was bitter and without any kind of lineage coming from her -- Ruth 4:14-15: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left

you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." God blesses the barren for His purpose. *"May he become famous throughout Israel."* Did they have any clue what they were saying?

Look at what happens next. Ruth 4:16, *"Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."* God didn't just bless her for His purpose in her barrenness. He blessed her for a much larger purpose.

You see, Ruth and Boaz, the story continues. They go on to become the great grandparents of King David himself. Her close descendant would be the king of Israel. This is where the story gets much bigger than just a love story down here. This is God showing that, even in the darkest period of His people in the book of Judges, that in the middle of that there was a light, and God was working to preserve His line, this royal lineage for His purpose. The weird thing is though that He does it through a Moabite. The royal lineage that leads to King David is through a woman from Moab. Now a Moabite's blood is in the line that leads to the king. This just doesn't add up.

But it gets even more confusing when you get a little further down the family line. You see a close descendant would be the king of Israel, but her distant descendant would be the King of the Nations. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, one last turn over to the New Testament. Matthew 1. I want you to look at this. I want you to see this. I want you to circle four names in Matthew 1. Matthew 1 -- the genealogy of Jesus -- that part of the Bible reading that you just skip over and think, "I just read half the chapter, just like that." You just get through it really quickly. That is what we do when we come to the genealogy. Well, don't do that on this genealogy.

I want you to look at what happens. All of this is leading to verse 16: *"...of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."* So this is the line of Jesus. It starts with Abraham. It goes to Jesus. I want you to look in this genealogy. In the first half that is leading up to Josiah, I want you to see four women that are mentioned. The fifth woman mentioned later is Mary, but I want you to see four women, and I want you to circle their names. Look in verse 3: *"...Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar..."* Circle that. Just know that Tamar, not only a woman mentioned in this line, but a woman who is also much like Lot's daughters, was guilty of incest. That is the first woman we see mentioned.

Second woman, verse 5: *"...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab..."* Circle that name. You can put a little note out to the side: She's a Gentile prostitute. So, we have a woman guilty of incest. We have a Gentile prostitute. Skip down to verse 6: *"David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife..."* Circle that right there. Another woman mentioned, an adulteress, Uriah's wife. You remember that whole story, David and Bathsheba.

Then, the fourth woman we passed over real quickly -- verse 5: *"...Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth..."* You can put a little side note that says a Gentile Moabite, stranger, forbidden, outcast, foreign. Four women mentioned here before Mary is mentioned. All four of them have some very colored backgrounds. What in the world are they doing in the line in Matthew 1 that leads to the King of Nations? Why are they mentioned?

Ladies and gentlemen, they are mentioned for the same reason that every single one of us

has the opportunity to have our names written in a Book of Life. They are written there because of the sovereign grace and mercy of God that calls the least expected, that calls the hurting and He calls the outcast and He calls the destitute and the people no one expects Him to call. He calls, and He says, "I am going to pour my grace and my mercy and my loving-kindness on you."

Before any one of us even begin to think that we deserve to be in this room, I remind you, based on Matthew 1, that we are here only by the grace of our Redeemer. The grace of our Redeemer who blessed us to fulfill His purpose. It comes to fruition, even when you get to Matthew 2. Remember God welcomes her, the stranger, to His place from a place of judgment to a place of promise. From Moab to where? Bethlehem. King Herod, Matthew 2:3,

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." (Matthew 2:3-6)*

Not only was Obed, son of Ruth and Boaz, born to them to lead to a line, but he was born where? He was born in Bethlehem. The picture is of a God who will fulfill His purpose. You know how He is going to fulfill His purpose? He is going to fulfill His purpose by pouring out His grace on the unexpected. Let me say that again. He will fulfill His purpose, and He will do it by pouring out His grace on the people we least expect it to happen to.

It just so happened in Matthew 2, God used the power of the Roman empire to bring about a census where everybody had to go back to their homeland, and this random guy named Joseph and his fiancée, Mary, amidst the controversy surrounding their relationship, have to make a journey from Northern Galilee back to Bethlehem, where the son of God will be born. In His line will be the nations represented.

The Point for Us...

Here is the overarching truth. We have seen the picture of Ruth, and we have seen the plan of God. The point for us and the reason why this love story is much more than a sappy walk-away -- that was a good story -- the reason is because the truth involves us in this story. The point for us is that God shows His glory by showering the destitute with His grace.

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