

The Book of Ruth

A Son of Hope

Ruth 4:13-22

The book of Ruth ends in climactic hope. Ruth has gone from being a widow, a stranger, a vulnerable gleaner, an uncoverer of feet in the darkness of night, to an Israelite, a redeemed woman, a wife, a mother, and an ancestress of king David and King of kings, Jesus Christ. She did not live to see all of God's goodness to her but she married Boaz and met Obed nine months later. The narrative part of Ruth ends with the reason she came to Israel: blessing Naomi. Ruth clung to Naomi: her path, her house, her people and her God, so all the blessings are theirs together. The book of Ruth teaches us to trust in the God who loads us up with *hesed*, His covenant kindness, which will never end.

Summary of the Text

Boaz marries Ruth, goes into the tent with her, and the Lord blesses her with a pregnancy and a son (v. 13). She had been married to Mahlon for years in Moab and didn't conceive, so this a remarkable pregnancy. The women who appeared earlier to greet Naomi when she returned bitterly from Moab now bless the Lord who has not left her without a kinsman-redeemer whose name they bless to be famous in Israel (v. 14). It's not just Boaz who loves her as a kinsman-redeemer; this son will restore life and nourish her in old age because her daughter-in-law, who is better to her than seven sons, has borne him (v. 15). Naomi lays him on her chest and cares for him as her neighbors say, "There is a son borne to Naomi" and call him Obed (vv. 16-17). He's the father of Jesse, the father of David (v. 17). A ten-generation genealogy follows beginning with Perez, son Judah and Tamar, leading to David, the man after God's own heart (vv. 18-22).

The Barren Gives Birth

God is author and giver of life. We live and move have our being in Christ, meaning that we cannot live without Him (Acts 17:28). Sin separates us from God and therefore brings death. Before the fall, the Lord blesses Adam and Eve to do the work and experience the joy of being fruitful and multiplying, but sin complicates everything. It brings death, and death is the end of life, a barren womb. Barrenness is therefore the result of the fall and would be all we have apart from God's grace. There are people who are purposefully barren and therefore under the Lord's judgment; hatred of life is a rebellion against God and consequence for hating Him (cf. Prov. 8:31). We don't have reason to think Ruth like this, but she did suffer barrenness for ten years. It's always God's mercy to grant new life in the womb, but this appears to be miraculous mercy and puts Ruth in company with Sarah who had Isaac when she was 90 years old. The barren giving birth is a motif that highlights the deathly consequences of our rebellion and the wonder of God's grace. This entire story has been one of life coming out of death. Famine in Bethlehem sends the family of Elimelech into Moab, a place of spiritual death. The boys get married, but they die without kids. Elimelech perishes. Naomi loses everything, tries to convince Ruth she has no more life to give, and comes back to Israel full of deathly grief. We need to remember only God can give life and He gives it to those who are dead in sins and trespasses. We serve a God who knows His way out of the grave.

Our Kinsman-Redeemer

The women bless the Lord for providing for Naomi; He has not left her without a kinsman-redeemer. God's *hesed*, His covenant love and grace, has sustained, restored, and now abundantly provided for her. Naomi lost her husband and both sons in the land of Moab, going there full and coming back empty. She complained that the Almighty testified against and afflicted her (1:21). Now the Lord has surrounded her with witnesses to the commitment of her kinsman-redeemer (4:9, 11). God's love is much, much more than sentiment. It is covenant-bound, life-changing grace. As our kinsman-redeemer He delivers promises not to leave nor forsake us, to provide a way of escape through any temptation, to bless and keep our children, to let nothing

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separate us from His love, to bring us to Himself at death and after that restore our bodies and swallow up death forever at the resurrection of the dead. Only He can do these things, but we exhibit this same grace as we cling to Him and to His people as Ruth did. This grace is a communicable attribute, one that God shares with us as image-bearers. A kinsman-redeemer had five duties. The first is to redeem out of slavery: “Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger’s family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again” (Lev. 25:47-48). The second is to avenge the oppressed or murdered kinsman, to get justice (Deut. 19:11-13). The third is to buy back their lost inheritance (Lev. 25:25). The fourth is to defend and act as a mediator (cf. Job 9:33). And the fifth is to serve as a *levir*, to marry a widow and raise up a son to carry on the name and inheritance of the deceased brother (Deut. 25:5-10). The love of kinsman-redeemer is so complex and multi-faceted because this is a glimpse into the depth of God’s love. Here we scratch the surface. Jesus has liberated us from our slavery to sin: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?... For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness” (Rom. 6:16, 20). Second, Jesus is also our avenger. He triumphed over His and our enemies on the cross, and at the final judgment He will render justice to everyone: “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). Third, Jesus has secured, restored, and increased our inheritance. Adam and Eve were exiled from the land. Christ bought the world with His blood. All earth and all the nations are His (which is why we are to disciple them Matt. 28:18-20) and the meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). Fourth, Jesus is our advocate, our mediator and defender: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1; 1 Tim. 2:5). And fifth, Jesus is the bridegroom who marries the widowed Church who was left destitute by the first Adam’s death. His has given us His Spirit without measure and the fruit of the Holy Spirit abounds in the Church as more and more people trust and love the living God. Obed is the new kinsman-redeemer after Peloni Almoni and Boaz. His name may be a shortened form of “Obadiah”, meaning “servant”, and he points to Christ, *the* suffering servant Isaiah prophesied about who would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities (Is. 53:5). Our redemption is total. Jesus has defeated our enemies, set us at liberty, secured our inheritance, given us His blessed name, and saved a number that cannot be numbered.

Genealogy of Grace

The book of Judges ends with “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25). The last word of this book is “David.” As the son of an illegitimate union, Perez could not enter the assembly of the Lord. Israel has been waiting for a descendant of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and David is the tenth generation, the first man eligible to do it (Deut. 23:2). In Genesis there are two other lists of ten generations, the first ending with Noah in chapter five and the second in chapter eleven ending with Abraham. David takes his place with these great patriarchs who advance God’s kingdom. Ruth is the eighth book, a new day for a new king who will unfold more of God’s plan to bring our kinsman-redeemer to save us from sin and death.