The Book of Ruth

Ruth Redeemed

Ruth 4:1-12

The day of decision arrives. Boaz honors the Lord by seeking the nearer kinsman who has first right of refusal to buy the land, but he also applies wisdom and cunning to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth. Boaz is both good and shrewd, laying his life down to love Ruth and honor the Lord.

Summary of the Text

Boaz goes right to the gate of the city, sits, and what do you know, the other kinsman-redeemer happens to come by (v. 1). Boaz invites So-and-so (*Peloni Almoni*) to sit and also gathers ten elders of the city who constitute a court to witness this proceeding (v. 2). He explains the situation: Naomi, who sold the land which belonged to their brother Elimelech, has come back from Moab and here is the opportunity to buy it back, to redeem the land and restore it to her (v. 3). He must buy it back in presence of the elders, and if not, Boaz will do so because he is next in line. The man responds right away: "I will redeem it" (v. 4). Boaz explains further that he must also redeem Ruth the Moabitess, the widow, and perform the duty of a *levir* and raise up a seed who will perpetuate then name of the dead and inherit the land (v. 5). The kinsman-redeemer responds saying to do this would ruin his own inheritance, so he cedes it to Boaz (v. 6). The author explains the previous custom for redeeming and exchanging where a man one would give the other man his sandal to confirm the right of redemption was passed on (v. 7). So Peloni Almoni gives his sandal to Boaz who declares to the elders and the people that he has bought all that was Elimelech's, Chilion's, and Mahlon's from Naomi (vv. 8-9). He has also acquired Ruth and will continue the name of the dead by raising a son who will inherit the land (v. 10). All the people at the gate and the elders state that they are witnesses and bestow a triple blessing: may the Lord make Ruth like Rachel and Leah who build the house of Israel; may he be prosperous in Ephrathah and renown in Bethlehem; and may his house be like the house of Perez because of the offspring the Lord will give through Ruth (vv. 11-12).

In the Gate

The gates of a city served as a gathering place for official business and judicial proceedings. The husband of the Proverbs 31 woman is known at the city gate and she is praised there (Prov. 31:23, 31). God said He would bless Abraham by multiplying his descendants who would possess the gate of their enemies (Gen. 22:17). Remember the whole city is excited when Naomi returns from Moab, and before the elders of the city Boaz speaks of "our brother Elimelech" as if the know him (1:19; 4:3). This is a noble or elite family among the tribe of Judah and Boaz wants to make everything official. His desires are righteous and he takes a huge public risk by trying to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth in front of everyone. Attempting great things always comes with risk—conflict, reputation, financial loss, criticism, and so on. Is it wise to go after this Moabitess who has clung to Naomi after her husband Mahlon, her brother-in-law Chilion, and her father-in-law Elimelech have all died? Naomi is a blessed Israelite. Isn't she the only remaining person in that family who brings Moabite culture into Israel? Is Boaz giving in to lusts that arose at night when Ruth lay at feet like prostitute and duped him to believe cares for Naomi when really she's digging for gold? Ruth's proposal happens at night but this new scene occurs in the light of day with witnesses everywhere seeing and evaluating what happens. Boaz pushes all of his chips in. He knows he wants to bless Elimelech, his widow, his widowed daughter-in-law, to serve the Lord and raise up a seed, and now so does everyone else. "Behold," the author says, "the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, 'Come aside, So-and-so, sit down here'" (v. 1). Once again the providence of God is evident, but once again it unfolds as Boaz is faithfully in the right place. He is faithful in the cover of darkness and now blessed with opportunity in the day. William Carey said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God", fighting for actually taking the gospel to the

nations. Boaz believes that the messiah will come for the nations through Israel, a nation he wants to preserve. He is not entitled but he is bold and aggressive: heading right to the gate, gathering the elders, and laying out the case.

What's-His-Name

Names have been important throughout this story. "Elimelech" means "my God is King", "Mahlon" means "dying", "Chilion" means "wasting", "Naomi" means "pleasant" (and "Mara", bitter), and "Ruth" means "friend." It's striking that Naomi's closest kinsman is called Peloni Almoni, the only character without a name. His title is much closer to "So-and-so" or "What's-His-Name" than "friend." He is "That Guy" and his name, which is not a name, might be a play on *alam* which means "quiet" or *almana*, "widow." We're not sure about that or him. In English we also rhyme words to make idioms like helter skelter, hodge podge, heebie jeebies. Peloni Almoni agrees at first to redeem Naomi's land. Because there is no male heir, by redeeming it he would add it to his estate and all he has to do after purchasing is provide for Naomi. Boaz knows this is a huge upside and offers it first. Peloni jumps on it, and then Boaz lays out the other conditions: he would not only need to buy the land from Naomi, but also from Ruth the Moabitess and fulfill the obligation of levirate marriage. This is interesting because neither Peloni Almoni nor Boaz are brothers of Mahlon, so technically they aren't strictly obligated to do this. Boaz sees a deeper right in keeping with the law and he leads the elders and the crowd that gathers to understand it as well. Peloni will not raise up a seed to continue the name of Elimelech; he doesn't want Ruth the Moabite. He says it would ruin his own estate, a tragic mistake of short-term thinking at best. He could have been the ancestor of King David and of Jesus Christ. It's a mercy that people in Israel don't know his name. Because he would not continue the name of his kinsman, his name is forgotten forever. Boaz puts his name on the line and he takes his place in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Triple Blessing

Twice Boaz tells the elders and the people that they are witnesses, and they state the same (vv. 9-10, 11). This is a judicial setting where his commitment is witnessed by the elders and his people. He is about to be blessed, but the greatest blessing is Ruth whom he has "acquired." This can sound merely transactional if taken out of context, but every marriage is the giving of persons and all they have to one another. Ruth offered herself if Boaz would take her under his wing. He gives everything to her and gladly cares for Naomi. The first blessing is upon Ruth and aligns her with the matriarchs of Israel, Rachel and Leah who birthed the tribes. The second is that he would be famous in the city and region. The third blessing links this story to Genesis 38 where Tamar tricked Judah into providing her with an heir. The Lord blessed that union with the mighty house of Perez, and the blessing calls for God to give barren Ruth a baby. The Lord fulfills all of these blessings. Ruth joins the genealogy of David and the son of David. Boaz's name is famous in Solomon's temple and the living temple of the Christian Church. God prospers the house of Boaz like the house of Perez with the son Obed, but later with *the* offspring of promise, the messiah Himself. Ruth isn't present for any of this. She will hear and rejoice just as we do, hearing the good news of Jesus Christ whose great redemption reaches the ends of the earth.