

RUTH 4:1-12

(Reading: Isaiah 43:1-13; Numbers 27:1-11)

It's All Settled!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

I want to especially ask our married ladies something as we begin considering these first twelve verses of Ruth chapter 4 this afternoon.

I want you to do this by thinking back to before you were married.

When you were going out with the gentleman who would be your future husband, at what point did you know it was going to be something very serious?

I mean, we could talk about when you first met, or how you got to meet.

We could reflect on when you first went out together, just the two of you.

But which particular event really said this is something quite serious?

At which stage did you know he was determined to marry you?

Ah, there should be no doubt about that, should there?

It was that time when he asked you for your hand in marriage!

It was on that day and at that time when he got down on bended knee, or something similar, and said those words.

We know the importance of that occasion because of the way you ladies remember it.

Not only the year or the month or the day of the week, but even the exact time of day it was!

Now, in the story of Ruth, that has just happened.

Boaz in verse 13 of chapter 3 has clearly asked for her hand in marriage.

But, and now let me talk to the married men, we know that asking your dearly beloved for her hand in marriage is only half of this.

Because what did you have to go and do next?

Which vital act was required to fulfil the requirements for being able to be properly wed?

Here we might think of going to a celebrant, and getting all the paperwork sorted out.

Our thoughts could turn here all those wedding arrangements, the church, the reception centre, the catering, the cars, the flowers, and so on.

And for many these days having a wedding planner is the most important thing.

All these are jumping the gun, though, aren't they?

For what the prospective groom needs to do straight away after asking his future wife, is to ask his future father-in-law!

He needs to respect not only tradition but especially what God's Word says.

We don't always think of it that way, do we?

The Law of Moses is quite clear, though, that a woman is part of her father's household until she gets married.

And so it's no wonder that before she leaves one household for another she has the affirmation of her father to do that.

In times past a father's refusal has meant that a couple cannot get married.

Today godly young people will delay their marriage or even not marry at all if the parents have serious concerns.

Now Boaz doesn't have a father to approach in this circumstance.

And we could think that he should then speak with Naomi.

Yet we've already seen her support for this with what she planned out for Ruth to do at the threshing floor.

It's here we need to realise the particular circumstance.

Something more was needed than parental approval in this case.

In fact, it is parental support but one that comes from the Father in heaven.

We can see this with all that Naomi had been planning in the previous chapter.

For there were wider aspects to take into account here.

Boaz here has to consider the wider family of God.

The regulations regarding the redemption of the land by close family had to be dealt with.

Remember, this is the Lord's land after all.

So, as part of the covenant community he needed to have this approved in the right court.

As this was something more than a simple family arrangement he had to have the official seal of approval.

He had to have the wisdom of the elders applying God's law, even though it's clear he's one of those elders himself.

Congregation, this is why we see first of all this afternoon, **BOAZ BRINGS THIS MATTER TO THE COURT.**

That's an interesting way of putting it, isn't it?

We think of law courts as overly involved legalities happening in huge old buildings.

But here it is at the town gate.

Because it's about those in the covenant community.

Just as the process of law today should be about the people in the community, and not about stuffily dressed up and overpaid people in that big old building arguing obscure points of law.

As we consider Boaz bringing this matter to the court we need to look first at the place of the kinsman-redeemer here.

You see, Israel had no police force as such.

When someone was beaten, robbed, or murdered, it was up to his closest family to bring the offender to justice.

They had to protect the lives and property of their relatives.

Leviticus 25 and Numbers 27 gave a list of those who responsible for saving their relatives, or redeeming them as we could also say.

Full brothers were at the top of that, then uncles who were the father's brothers, then full cousins, and finally it came down to the other blood relatives of the family.

There were four requirements to be a kinsman-redeemer.

The redeemer must be a close relative; he must be able to pay the redemption price; he must be willing to redeem; and he must be free from that which caused the need for redemption.

In other words, he must be free himself.

Congregation, how much of our Lord Jesus do we not see in this shadow in the Old Testament?

He was the ultimate kinsman-redeemer who became one of us, who laid down His life as a sacrifice for us, who was willing to save us, and who was completely free of the sin which binds us!

We can see in what Boaz does here, the Lord God amongst His people.

Next we note the importance of the town gate.

This was their court room, as we've already noted.

There business transactions took place and legal matters were resolved.

As we might use a Justice of the Peace today to certify and confirm details so there were always elders at that place to adjudicate and testify.

Boaz was certainly known in this place.

It is clear he would normally be one of the elders who met there.

His legal knowledge is such that he knew straight away what to do.

And he certainly does it!

As quick as possible he goes to the town gate and sits there.

Soon enough the closer relative comes by.

At this stage he has no idea what this could be about but he would have been involved in business transactions any way.

So he wouldn't have been surprised that Boaz takes him aside together with ten of the elders.

Why ten?

Well, where do we have such a similar number in a court of law today?

Ah, a jury has around ten - twelve actually.

And now we begin to see that this is an important case.

While some commentators say this was a relatively minor matter, with the elders having relatively little to do or decide, it means a lot to those involved.

Because this is about the future of a family's name in Israel, no less!

Thus while two or three witnesses would normally be acceptable here there is to be no doubt what's decided.

Boaz is very, very serious about this!

Carefully Boaz lays out the case to his relative.

So wisely, in fact, this has been called Boaz' 'masterstroke'.

You see, he begins with talking about the land.

Property, of course, is always an attractive asset and definitely something that would have got his relative's attention.

Now, we might be wondering exactly how this land ties in.

It's the first we've heard about Naomi having a specific piece of real estate.

And no other details are given.

The only thing we know is that it had belonged to Elimelech and Naomi was a kind of guardian over it.

Later on in verse 9 it's described as having belonged to Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon, so the idea of a trust that Naomi manages makes some sense.

Perhaps in her poverty Naomi has to sell this land.

Thus it is she is seeking out a kinsman redeemer.

Or it could be that having lost the land in some unfair act she wants someone to act on her behalf for its return to the family.

There is the story in 2nd Kings 8 where a widow appeals to the king for her land after it was taken away from her like that.

But the most likely situation is that, because there was no male heir, Naomi is invoking the levirate provisions of the law so that she can keep it in the family.

It seems that the concept of a male needing to marry the remaining wife is tied in with the inheritance of the land.

Naturally the close relative is keen.

It is Naomi selling the land after all.

She isn't able to have more children.

And once she passes away it becomes part of his heritage.

So when Boaz asks him if he will redeem it the answer seems obvious enough.
It's too good an offer to refuse!

Thus it is he is positive about redeeming it.
And then Boaz turns the whole equation on its head.

In the words of our second aspect to this passage, **BOAZ LAYS IT ALL BEFORE THE COURT.**

Congregation, we must not forget the legal nature of what's happening here.
There's a jury that is looking on.
They will be those who make sure that this judgment is enforced.

So Boaz now brings in the key aspect to this case.
In verse 5 he says to his close relative, "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."

Now Ruth's name is drawn in.
And as it's drawn in the connection is clearly made to continuing the family line through her.

You can almost hear a pin drop.
'Oops!'
'Hadn't quite thought of that!'

This changes things right around!
And not in a way that favours the other relative!
Because now he realises that not only will he have another wife to support but his own sons won't get the property anyway!
Or at least it's highly unlikely as this young woman, Ruth, will probably have her own children.

Now, this closer relative can refuse.
And the way Boaz has put it to him, he has every opportunity to get out of this quite lightly.

For under the provisions of the law in Deuteronomy 25 there could be quite some disgrace to not redeem.

There it even gets to the brother's wife, in the presence of the elders, taking his sandal off his foot, spitting in his face, and declaring, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line."

Here it is different, however.
Whether it is because this is a wider family situation, or because there's been a change in the application of the law, but that's not going to happen here.

Let's note, then, how Boaz has nicely worked this to get it his way.

And so it is that a sandal does come into this.

Yet here it is a sandal used in a different way.

Rather than now being a humiliating insult it has become part of the official process.

How and why this has occurred we don't know.

What we do know is that the foot was used to describe possession.

In Joshua 1 verse 3, for example, the Lord says to Joshua as he's about to enter the Promised Land, "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses."

Thus the sandal had come to symbolise ownership of land.

The right to redeem now falls to Boaz.

In verse 6 the close relative declares this.

And in verse 8 he states firmly, "Buy it yourself."

Was there something a little underhand in all this?

Could Boaz have been a little bit sneaky here?

Actually, no.

While Boaz has laid out the situation so that it's clear the closer kinsman-redeemer can only pass it on to him, that only shows how much of a kinsman-redeemer he is.

He voluntarily and quite willingly took on the responsibilities involved in this.

And it was quite a commitment, involving much personal sacrifice and love.

The closer relative was being quite honest about this when he acknowledged this might endanger his own estate.

And so it is that again we see the nature of true faith.

This brings us now to the third part of this passage.

For now **BOAZ GETS THE JUDGMENT OF THE COURT.**

Notice how the very next thing Boaz does is to make a public declaration.

To those ten elders and to the people all around, and I'm sure there would have been quite a crowd gathering around, he makes a statement.

As we read in verses 9 and 10, he says, "Today you are witnesses that I have brought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon.

"I 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!"

It's a carefully thought out wording.

Perhaps that's because it was according to the established protocol for these situations.

Whatever the case, we can certainly note the positive air about it.

While the use of the sandal in Deuteronomy 25 was associated with a negative judgment here it becomes part of a joyful celebration.

A happiness shared by all the people gathered there.

And why not?

This is about a marriage.

Two of the covenant community are being joined together by the Lord!

And that's very much part of the society as a whole.

As it should be!

Not only must the wider family and friends be involved in guiding those seeking marriage to the right partners but they are also sharing in it when it does happen.

It's fine if you want to have your honeymoon in Thailand, Fiji, or Bali, but don't get married there!

Congregation, what we have here from those elders and all the people there is the precursor to what we hear whenever two of God's children are joined in marriage today.

Because what does the minister announce there?

He says, "In the presence of God and His people..."

The covenant community are looking on.

In verse 11 and 12 they whole-heartedly endorse what is clearly according to God's will.

They reply to Boaz, "We are witnesses.

"May the LORD make the woman who is coming into you 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."

It's certainly an invoking of some of the important people in Israel history.

They are the famous and the infamous.

Why invoke the names of Rachel and Leah?

Leah fair enough.

She was their ancestor.

But here it's not about which direct line it is as much as that Boaz and Ruth might be blessed as they were.

For Rachel and Leah, with their handmaids, produced the twelve sons of Jacob.

They're the mothers of the nation.

The twelve sons become twelve tribes.

Well, if Rachel and Leah were the famous then Tamar was definitely the infamous.

And we may wonder at her name being mentioned here?

But though the circumstance of their bearing children in the covenant line was quite different, there are similarities.

The most obvious one is that both Tamar and Ruth weren't Israelites.

Ruth is a Moabitess and Tamar was a Canaanite.

But the connection here is more likely because of Perez.

It is the family line down from Perez which has their land in and around Bethlehem.

This is the area that part of the tribe of Judah was given.

As Perez was born from a levirate relationship, so too will the offspring of Boaz and Ruth be.

And how much isn't it the people's prayer that they be blessed just as bountifully!

If it is likely that Boaz was childless and perhaps not even married, the mention of "this young woman" very much has that thought in mind.

As Judah was old when he conceived through Tamar, and yet a blessed line developed, so too is the prayer here.

As Elimelech's line will continue through this so too will Boaz' line.

There is definitely the air of celebration here.

The people know this is the Lord's doing.

At a time in Israel's history where so much had been going wrong this is truly right!

Here is God's covenant relationship with His people mirrored in the relationships His people take with each other.

Every time you witness a Christian wedding, think of that, dear friends.

Whenever you hear those well-known vows being declared reflect about how God has related to us through His Son.

Then you will rejoice.

Because then you know you are truly blessed.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O God of the covenant, You who has redeemed for yourself a people through the blood of Your own dear Son, we praise Your most gracious name.

Thank You for the joy in this passage.

Thank You for the story which reminds us of the one who has found us and who now keeps and guides us.

Please stir us to always look to you.

Don't let us be distracted and seduced by the things of this world, but, like Boaz,
to live in the faith that You are there and You do care.
Through Christ our Lord, we pray, Amen.