

SERMON ON RUTH CHAPTER 4

25 AUGUST 2019

1 Introduction

- (a) During August we have been looking at the Book of Ruth. We have had three excellent sermons from Mike on chapter 1, Brian Harris on chapter 2 and last week from Jonathan Sinclair on chapter 3.
- (b) The theme of chapter 4 is Redemption and Restoration. The previous chapter left us with and in something of a cliff hanger. Ruth and Boaz are obviously in love and want to get married. However there is a kinsman closer to Ruth and he has priority.

2 Recap on the Book

- (a) The Book of Ruth is many things. On the surface it is a love story of a poor widow from Moab, a foreigner, finding acceptance, marriage and fulfilment from an influential man of Israel. But beneath the surface, much more is waiting to be revealed.
- (b) Ruth lived in an age similar to our own. National tragedies causing widespread death and dislocation to people's lives were not uncommon, and we had a powerful summary on the plight of refugees from Jonathan last week. The rule of law was often ignored. Personal challenges were there to be faced and overcome. Relationships, both personal and business, were complicated. The Book of Ruth explores the impact of these things on our lives and assists us to find God and real meaning through them.
- (c) Within all of this, we see how then as now some are able to enter into the promises of God, while others do not. This book helps us to be those who enter into the Kingdom of God to enjoy all He has promised – an ultimately, like Ruth, to be part of the lineage of Jesus Christ, in our case through his sacrificial death on our behalf.

3 Versus 1 to 6

- (a) A few words about the guardian/redeemer. The so called guardian/redeemer and his role is conceptually similar to a legal guardian of a minor, or someone else under a legal disability in our society. However, the position is also similar to what we understand by a Trustee. Someone who holds land or property on behalf of another. Trusts are a particular innovation of English law and come to us from the Normans. It is a fundamental principle of our trust law that a Trustee must at all times act in good faith in the best interests of those for whom he acts. Secondly, also that he should never allow his duty to his beneficiary/ies to conflict with his own personal interests. We will see how well the guardian/redeemer, or guardian/trustee as I'm calling him, and Boaz measure up to these exacting standards.

- (b) The Town Gate was the place where important decisions were made including decisions of a legal nature. Boaz went to the Town Gate with the clear intention of resolving Ruth and Naomi's situation by a resolution that would be legally binding and agreed by the town elders. As he was at the gate, the unnamed family or guardian redeemer came by and gave Boaz an immediate opportunity to speak with him – in the hearing of the elders. Boaz did not try to deal with the situation furtively or behind closed doors.
- (c) Boaz was also friendly towards his rival. There was no need for an aggressive dispute. Usually we cause more difficulty than we need have by being aggressive. If we seek to build a relationship whenever a dispute arises, we will find that it ends better than if we act aggressively. It is worth remembering that the character of God is one of humility and love.
- (d) Boaz clearly wanted to marry Ruth as he introduced some novel arguments when he met his rival at the Town Gate. Neither Boaz nor the unnamed rival was required to marry Ruth according to Jewish law and custom. The introduction of Ruth into his negotiation was a deliberate ploy to ensure that Boaz was given the freedom to marry her.
- (e) Having initially been very interested in acquiring the land, the guardian redeemer's reason for rejecting the whole proposition was greed – let's make no mistake about it. With no heir, Elimelech's land would be owned by whoever bought it. But if there was an heir, the land would return to that heir at the time of the Jubilee. The rival did not want to buy the land because he could lose it again if Ruth produced an heir. If he redeemed Ruth, he would be responsible for ensuring she had a child. Despite the fact that the child would also be his offspring, under the right of ownership, the land belonging to Elimelech would belong to Ruth's child not the father.
- (f) We do not know the guardian redeemer's personal circumstances. He could well have had other wives and children. Whatever those circumstances were, the guardian/redeemer placed his personal interests before his duty to Ruth. The fact he has no name is significant – he represents all those who decide they do not wish to behave honourably and/or take a decision not to place themselves within the purposes of God.
- (g) Boaz was honourable in giving his rival an opportunity to fulfil his responsibility. He was also wise in the way he devised the opportunity. In stating that Ruth was also part of the negotiation, with the witness of the elders, Boaz ensured that she would be looked after well. His rival would be under considerable pressure from the town elders to fulfil the agreement that he had made. But Boaz also knew that by bringing Ruth into the negotiation his rival would have to consider the financial issues. The rival was not interested in fulfilling the requirement that the land was to be kept in the ownership of Elimelech's family – that is Ruth and her descendants. The rival only had a selfish interest to expand his own territory.
- (h) Our actions also need to be committed under the scrutiny of others. If we are honest and honourable, we need not fear what others think of us. "Dictum meum pactum" – "My word is my bond". This used to be the principle which governed the doing of all business (whether by bankers, insurers, accountants, lawyers) in the City of London and to this day is the motto of the London Stock

Exchange. A lot changed in the City with the advent of the so called Big Bang in October 1986. Many credit these changes with restoring the City as the financial capital of the world. Unfortunately by 2008 many in the City had forgotten or ignored the underlying principle of honour and fair dealings and became motivated by greed and the size of their bonuses – all of which was the direct cause of the global financial crisis, the effects of which remain with us to this day.

- (i) Boaz, on the other hand, simply wanted to be honourable. He did not have any knowledge of the consequences of his actions, but they were considerable. They ensured that the story written about him showed his honourable nature and that he was worthy to be counted as the great-grandfather of King David and one of the ancestors of Jesus.

4 **Verses 7 and 8**

- (a) The handing over of the sandal. A slightly strange tradition, which had already become obsolete by Ruth's time. This is conceptually similar to the way the transfer of land used to take place in our country before 1925 – by the physical handing over of Title Deeds. The key point is that the guardian redeemer wanted to make it publicly clear that he was hand over the land and divesting himself of any duty he owed to Ruth.

5 **Verses 9 to 12**

- (a) The motivation of Boaz in marrying Ruth was to uphold and to bless her. He was not motivated by greed to acquire any of the land belonging to Naomi and Ruth. That land would become the inheritance of any heir coming from his union with Ruth. Boaz was impressed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and by her desire to do what was honourable. He may also have been impressed by her beauty – but that is not disclosed in the history that we have. The emphasis in the story of Ruth is on her inner character not her external beauty.
- (b) The elders who witnessed the agreement that Boaz would buy the land and with it the right to marry Ruth, blessed the marriage and prophesied to them: *"We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel ..."*. Rachel and Leah were of course the mothers of the sons of Jacob – the foundation of the nation of Israel.
- (c) The prophecy of the elders was fulfilled in that Ruth did bear a child. From that child came David, who was the greatest earthly king Israel produced. Also from Ruth's line came Jesus from whom come everyone born into the kingdom of God.

6 **Versus 13 to 17**

- (a) The whole community seems to have had an interest in the success of Boaz and Ruth. When their child was born, it was a community time of celebration and thanksgiving.
- (b) It seems that it was Naomi who was most restored from the birth of her grandson. Naomi had lost all of the men in her life – her husband and sons.

Ruth brought new hope for their ancestry by bearing a son named Obed. That new life restored the joy and hope that had previously been lost. That new life also took away the bitterness of Naomi and she could once again be called blessed.

7 **Conclusion**

- (a) As I said at the start, chapter 4's theme is redemption and restoration. The book is the story of how the Lord reaches out to an outsider, Ruth, and brings her to the centre of His purposes.
- (b) If you think about it, we all start out our lives as outsiders. But, like Ruth, we can move to the centre of God's purposes as we faithfully trust Him and serve the people He gives us. As we, like Ruth, shake off all of the things which hold us back and entangle us and, in our case, look to Jesus for our redemption, He will lead us into His purposes, and we will then have the opportunity to bear much fruit for Him.
- (c) Finally our gospel reading this morning from Matthew chapter 6 is a dramatic and powerful reminder from Jesus about the risk of greed, which we have an example of in the Book of Ruth. "You cannot serve God and money", says Jesus. Jesus could equally have said "You cannot behave honourably, like Boaz, and also be driven by greed, like the guardian/redeemer".

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25 August 2019