

Ruth 3 &4: The Kinsman Redeemer, a Christmas Story.

So far, we have learned that the story of Ruth was a historic record of two real people in the historic lineage of Jesus. And we have also learned that her story was told in such a way to make it a parable, teaching lessons about running away from God versus returning back to God. But the most important lesson from the story of Ruth, which we will learn today, is about the ancient law of the **kinsman redeemer**, which is what allowed Boaz to rescue Naomi's family and what continues to allow Jesus to redeem us. But in order to get to this wonderful part of Ruth's story, let's revisit events up to this point.

The first scene of the story of Ruth opens tragically. Hoping to escape famine, a man named, "God is my king," chooses instead to run from God by moving his family out of the Promised Land to go live in a forbidden country. There over a period of ten years, the troubles he had hoped to escape catch up with both him and his two sons; all three die, leaving those who depended upon them – their wives – in desperate circumstances. **Running from God always brings not only personal devastation but perhaps also pain and suffering to those you love.**

So Naomi, Elimelech's widow, hearing that life was better in Israel, decides to go back home. She is able to convince one of her Moabite daughters-in-law to return to her own people, but the other daughter-in-law, Ruth, refuses to leave her, making a vow of faithfulness to both God and Naomi that only death would ever separate the two of them.

Scene two then opens with the two destitute widows having now arrived back home in Bethlehem without any means of supporting themselves. While Naomi gives in to bitter despair, her daughter-in-law Ruth takes on the personally risky task of gleaning food for both of them from the local farmer's fields, which was allowed by Israeli law for widows, orphans, and even foreigners, if the locals would honor such for a despised Moabite.

Then, through a series of lucky coincidences – remember **a coincidence is God acting anonymously** – Ruth arrives at the field of Boaz, both a godly and wealthy man who is also a relative of Elimelech. Having already heard of her and Naomi's circumstances and now watching her work, Boaz not only asks a blessing on Ruth for seeking "*refuge under the wings of the Lord, God of Israel,*" he himself becomes a part of that blessing by insuring that Ruth will be protected from harm while always being able to glean more than enough food for her and her mother-in-law.

Having returned home with an abundance of food, as Ruth is telling of Boaz's generosity, Naomi's bitterness begins to transform into a glimmer of hope when she realizes that just maybe Boaz would become their "**kinsman redeemer**" who could restore back to them, not only their land, but also a secure future along with the family name. Naomi and Ruth returned home looking only for a favor but they also found

grace as God worked behind the scenes blessing these two women through the generosity of Boaz. **Whether we recognize it or not, God's providence is always working to bring about good for those who love Him and have called upon His name.**

Scene three opens four months later, with Ruth regularly bringing home plenty of food from Boaz's fields. Naomi can see that Boaz is affectionate towards Ruth, possibly even loves her, but for whatever reason he has taken no steps towards becoming their kinsman redeemer. So Naomi decides that it is time for Ruth to act.

Now in order to understand the importance of being a "**kinsman redeemer**," we need to learn what this ancient law did for Israelites like Naomi and Ruth, who found themselves in desperate physical circumstances. And how the divine concept of kinsman redeemer still works to rescue us from our desperate spiritual circumstances.

According to Israel law, the kinsman-redeemer had to be a close relative who, if willing, could act to redeem – to buy back – a family, who was in a time of crisis and unable to rescue themselves. This kinsman redeemer could:

- Buy back property that out of poverty had to be sold, returning it to the one who was forced to sell. (Leviticus 25: 25-38)
- Buy back the freedom of any relative who, out of poverty, had been forced to sell themselves into slavery. (Leviticus 25: 39-43, 47-55)
- Avenge a family murder, claiming blood for blood (numbers 35:19)
- Or redeem a family line from disappearance by marrying a childless widow in order raise up children in her deceased husband's name (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

However, there were three important requirements necessary to qualify as a kinsman redeemer.

1. The redeemer had to be a **blood relative** of the person being redeemed: a brother, an uncle, or a cousin.
2. The redeemer also had to be **able**, usually financially, to redeem what was lost.
3. And the redeemer had to be **willing** to do so, knowing that this action will never personally benefit themselves but only the person whom they are redeeming.

Boaz was quite eligible on the first two accounts. Not only to serve as a redeemer for Naomi's land, but also in marrying Ruth to raise up children in her husband's name. But for whatever reason Boaz had not signaled his willingness to be that kinsman redeemer.

If Boaz could be persuaded to do so, this would be the best of all outcomes for the two widows. Because otherwise Ruth would have to continue gleaning for the rest of her

life, or she could marry another man in the village who would insure their livelihood, but he would not be able restore either their land or their family name.

Since Boaz hasn't acted in their interest, Naomi decides its time for the two of them to see if they could make something happen. She instructs Ruth to get cleaned up, put on her best clothes and some perfume and go to a midnight rendezvous with Boaz while he is sleeping out on the threshing floor guarding their recently processed barley harvest. There she was to essentially offer herself to him - trusting that he will take the hint and move ahead with marriage.

But this idea of "meeting on the threshing floor" was quite risky - it's a lot like parking in Lover's Lane or sneaking into the hayloft - a tempting setting for a romantic encounter. It would have raised a few eyebrows as people passed this story around. "Uncovering a man's feet", in this type of setting, was often a sign that you were ready for sexual intercourse. This doesn't mean that Ruth was prepared to go that far on this encounter, but she is definitely making the statement that she is willing to marry Boaz and be his partner. It is also a gesture of trust, that Ruth knows she can make herself vulnerable to Boaz and not be taken advantage of.

Startled awake in the middle of the night to find a woman laying beside him, Boaz is delighted to hear Ruth asking him to "*spread your cloak over your servant.*" The Hebrew word translated here as **cloak** was the same word Boaz used to describe God's **wings** of refuge. Thus, Ruth was asking Boaz to answer his own prayer for her.

Delighted by her request Boaz now tells her why he had not acted earlier.

- First, because he thought he was too old to be attractive to her. Being young and pretty, Ruth could have found many a younger man willing to marry her.
- Second, because while he could be her kinsman redeemer, there was another relative even closer who had the first right to make such a claim.

Promising, if possible, that he would act as she requested, Boaz sends Ruth home before daylight with another heaping load of grain thus signaling to Naomi the success of their daring plot.

You know the rest of the story. When asked, that closer **relative** is **qualified** and **able**, but **unwilling** ... not wanting to risk his own inheritance in becoming a kinsman redeemer for Ruth.

Thus Boaz is thus free to marry Ruth and together they bear a son named **Obed**, "servant of God," who is the delight of both his mother and his grandmother Naomi, and who then grows up to become the grandfather of King David and also in the time of Jesus. An interesting final twist to this tale, is that the closer relative who wished to preserve his family name, was the only one unnamed in Ruth's story.

That's a nice story you say, but how then does this ancient law enable Jesus to be our savior?

First you need to know that God is a loving God, but also just. In His desire to rescue us, God cannot break or set aside any of his own laws concerning sin and justice; All of us have sinned and our sins have enslaved us under death (Romans 3:23, 6:23). Thus we all are doomed to die unless a kinsman who is both able and willing pays the price to redeem us from death; hence the law of the kinsman redeemer.

So, let's now look at Jesus' qualifications to be our kinsman redeemer.

First, the kinsman redeemer has to be **A NEAR RELATIVE BY BLOOD**. In Ruth's story, Boaz was the nearest relative both able and willing to be her redeemer. That Jesus might become our redeemer is the reason for his incarnation; being born as a human. He became flesh and blood like us in order to be related to us – our near relative. This qualifies Jesus to be our Kinsman!

The Apostle Paul opened his letter to the Romans declaring himself to be a messenger, sent to share the "*good news of [God's] Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by [his] resurrection from the dead...*" (1:1-4).

Then the letter of Hebrews actually describes how Jesus qualifies as our blood relative.

[Jesus] the one who [redeems] and those who are [being redeemed] **all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters ...**

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. (2:11-15)

There's a popular song that sings *with God as our Father, brothers all are we...* Now you know how true that thought is.

Second, the kinsman redeemer needs to be **ABLE TO REDEEM**. Before a kinsman can even hope to redeem someone they themselves must be free and not a slave. A drowning person cannot save another one who's drowning! Boaz was a free man, in debt to no one and with sufficient resources to be Ruth's kinsman redeemer.

What resources does Jesus have making Him **able** to be our redeemer?

Because Jesus Himself was free from sin. Thus He was able with His death to pay the price for our sin. Scripture tells us that...

God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God
2 Cor. 5:21

And being God's son, Jesus has sufficient resources in His one life to redeem all our lives. One of my most treasured Bible verses tells me

That when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.** Galatians 4:4-5

That then is the purpose for which Jesus came into the world; in order to be our kinsman redeemer. Now you know that Jesus has both the blood **relationship** and the God given **ability** to be our redeemer even though the price demanded of Him will be His life for ours. Yet there is one more requirement.

Relationship and ability alone are not enough, the kinsman redeemer also needs to be WILLING TO REDEEM, willing to pay the needed price for our redemption. The unknown kinsman who was nearer than Boaz, refused to be the redeemer after hearing that Ruth came with the package! He did not want to mar his inheritance by raising up seed through a Moabite widow. Boaz however knew all about Ruth, every little detail of her! Her ancestry, her history, was no mystery to him and he was very willing! He knew her past and her present and he dearly wanted to be a vital part of her future! In the same way Jesus has demonstrated His willingness to be our redeemer. Jesus knows all about our past and present and He very much wants to be a part of our future. **Here's another beautiful verse describing Jesus' willingness**

[Jesus] **gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity** and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.
Titus 2:14

In describing himself, Jesus said, *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many,* Matthew 20:28 Jesus also said, *I am the good shepherd. I give my life for the sheep.*

So this is the most important lesson we need to learn from the story of Ruth. Boaz serving as the kinsman-redeemer to Ruth is a beautiful illustration of how Jesus Christ

can be our kinsman-redeemer. Jesus Christ fulfills all of the requirements. Yet, the debt He pays is not to buy us out of physical slavery or restore property that was lost, but to redeem us out of our bondage of death and to spiritually restore our family relationship to God our Father that was long ago lost by Adam.

But like Boaz with Ruth, Jesus won't force that relationship on us. Jesus must wait for each one of us to come asking him to be our redeemer, to request that He spread His wings over us so that we also might find our refuge in Him.

I hope you take this message to heart so that you might rejoice in the family relationship you now share with Jesus your redeemer brother. And if you haven't sought refuge under the wings of Jesus your kinsman redeemer, don't hesitate to do so today....your very life now and in the future depends upon this.

But perhaps you haven't yet figured out why I would call this a perfect Christmas message? Let me answer your question in the words of a beautiful Appalachian Carol.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
why Jesus my savior did come for to die,
for poor on'ry sinners like you and like I.
I wonder as I wander out under the sky,

Well, now you know why.

Christmas celebrates the birth of God's son, who came to be our brother, our Kinsman Redeemer, so that He may bring us all back home to where we belong.

Let's bow our heads and thank God our Father for Jesus our Brother.