

Ruth 4

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[0 : 00] And turn back to Ruth chapter 4. It's on page 224.

! Well, the book of Ruth, it appears, doesn't it, in one of the darkest, most disheartening parts of the whole Bible.

We saw, didn't we, three weeks ago as we started this book, it begins in chapter 1, verse 1. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

And if you know the Bible story well, you'll know that it's a particularly dark period in the life of God's people. Where there is famine, there is disobedience, and there is dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Before the book of Ruth, the book of Judges, it is shot through, isn't it, with the repetitive downward spiral of the problems caused by human sin, of moral weakness, and stupidity.

[1 : 12] And it's a realistic picture, isn't it, of the world in which we live, actually. And yet God graciously gives us this piercing ray of light.

This little shaft of light, this book, it's only four chapters long, isn't it, but it's like a small but bright star in the middle of an otherwise ordinary dark black sky.

And it twinkles, doesn't it. It shines with the hope of God's kindness to his people in their mistakes and in their sins.

And it gives hope to outsiders like Ruth. We've seen the book deal with lots of themes, haven't we, with God's justice and his holiness. But unashamedly, we want to say tonight that it's a book that is largely about love.

It's a book about love. God, in his wisdom, has seen it as the right thing to do, to teach us about his character through this book, through a true story of romantic love.

[2 : 21] Of a relationship between this man, Boaz, and this woman, Ruth. It's a love story. So it says to us, doesn't it, that God is a God of justice and of holiness.

Ruth wasn't allowed in, was she, as a Moabite. But he is a God of great love. He is stupendously, overwhelmingly loving to human beings who come to him, even from the darkest places, places furthest from him.

And in this last chapter, chapter 4, we see that God's love reaches its fruition in her life through the love of this Christ-like figure, Boaz.

We see the love of God in Christ, in Christ Jesus. And the first thing that we notice tonight is that God's love is a complete love.

It's a complete love through Christ Jesus. Now on Sunday evenings, you're probably sick to the back teeth now, aren't you, of period drama, love story illustrations.

[3 : 30] Some of you more than others. But you might know Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins from *Pride and Prejudice*. Yes, David. He is the rich, stuck-up parson, isn't he, who lives down the road in the village.

And he wants to buy the love of Elizabeth Bennet, who is the main female character. Now as you watch the story, you see Mr. Collins kind of squirming.

And you feel that they just don't belong together. We know that she doesn't love him, but the parents know that he's rich and they want her to marry him.

It's a marriage of convenience. And so there's a tension there. There's an unease. You want to shout at her, don't marry him. Don't marry him. Don't do it. And isn't that the stuff of all great love stories?

Where you watch the girl and the guy, they grow together, don't they, in love. And then another suitor appears at the last moment to steal her from the aisle, just before they get married.

[4 : 32] There's a tension. And one of the great things that the author brings out at the beginning of chapter 4 and the end of chapter 3 is a tension in the romance of Ruth and Boaz.

So do you remember last Sunday evening we were left, weren't we, on the edge of our seats, after Boaz gives Ruth a pledge of his willingness to marry her, to redeem her in marriage, to give definitive security and rest to her.

But there is news of another relative of the same clan, who could be the first in line to marry Ruth instead.

Now we've watched, haven't we, this pair grow in love together, in their courtship. And by now, even the most unfeeling, even the most unromantic amongst us, is desperate to see them together, aren't we?

Not this other relative guy. But Boaz, he is a man of God's law. And he knows that he has to do things by the Levitical law, God's law, to fulfil righteousness.

[5 : 39] Which does entitle this other guy to have first dibs, if you like. So Boaz, in verses 1-4, he arranges a public meeting with this other man.

He gets the elders of the city together at the gate. At the gate is where public contracts would have been signed, where goods would have been exchanged. It was a public place, so that people could recognise this discussion.

And he gives this other redeemer the first part of the deal, doesn't he? To which he is entitled to. Which is to buy the land from her mother-in-law, Naomi.

And as the conversation goes, our hearts slowly sink, don't they? As we hear that this other redeemer is actually up for this. We hear the words in verse 4, don't we, at the end of verse 4.

I will redeem it. This other redeemer, he says, yeah, no, that sounds like a good deal. Buying the property would have been a pretty lucrative move.

[6 : 45] This other redeemer could buy the land and then earn from its produce. He could afford to do that. And so the Ruth Boaz dream could be about to be shattered.

But the whole law, the whole law must be fulfilled. And Boaz is clever here, isn't he? Fair enough, he says, but just one other thing.

Verse 5. Buying the land will also mean taking on the responsibility of marrying Ruth. And fathering her children.

To perpetuate, isn't it, the line of her dead husband. So the lucrative part of the deal, the land, it also comes with the lass, with Ruth.

They're not sold separately, are they? The complete package to be redeemed and paid for holds within it the responsibility towards Ruth and her family.

[7 : 49] As well as owning the land. So that makes it a significantly less attractive deal, doesn't it? For this other guy. Look at verse 6. The redeemer at this point said, I cannot redeem it for myself.

Lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption for yourself. For I cannot redeem it. This other guy, he's got his own family, hasn't he?

And it would cost him to buy the land, which his own children may never receive as an inheritance. It would have to go to the children that he would father with Ruth.

It's Ruth's side of the family who would be entitled to the property in the long term. That's how the law says it must be done. But it's too much of a sacrifice.

Too much for this redeemer to bear. I cannot redeem it, he says. Twice. I cannot redeem it. He could afford the deal earlier on, but only to a point. He could redeem the land, but he can't redeem her.

[8 : 56] It's going to actually cost him to do that, isn't it? He will lose out. He can't afford the loss of having Ruth involved in this deal.

The cost was too heavy. The responsibility too high. The price too great of fulfilling the whole law of the matter. In the words of the great philosopher Meatloaf in that song, I would do anything for love, but I won't do that.

I can't do that. There was a limit to his redemption. He's got to look after his own family, hasn't he? There was a limit to his redemption, and that limit was his limited love.

There was no love for Ruth herself, was there? No affection for Ruth. So don't we see at this point here, don't we, in the book of Ruth, Boaz's love for Ruth more than we ever did.

That where another has realised the full cost, and has not been willing, he is willing. Where another has a limited interest, Boaz has a complete love for her.

[10 : 15] Where he takes on the burden, and the responsibility of her, of redemption, not just of the good bits, the lucrative bits. He is willing to fulfil the whole law for her.

Which will mean giving up his rights. He's willing to pay the full price, with a full sacrifice, really, of his life, isn't it? The rest of his life for her and her family.

It was a complete love. And we get a very public declaration from Boaz, of his complete love. He confirms this transaction to redeem Ruth and the land, to continue the line of Malon, the dead husband.

And he takes his sandal off, doesn't he? In verse 7 to 8. Now I'm not 100% sure on why that is. But the passage says, doesn't it, that that was the custom of the time.

The interesting thing, though, is the obsession in this transaction with witnesses. Did you notice that? There are witnesses everywhere, aren't there?

[11 : 21] Witnesses in verse 2. Ten men from the elders. Verse 9. The elders and all the people. He says to them, you are witness. Verse 10. He asserts to them again, you are witnesses.

Witnesses. Verse 11. All the people said we are witnesses. Witnesses, witnesses, witnesses everywhere. And it shows to us, doesn't it, that Boaz wants this exchange to be totally watertight. To be legitimate. Completely binding. To be public. And recognised. He wants there to be no doubt in anybody's mind, let alone Ruth's mind, that this is real.

That he means absolute business. That this is not a fly-by-night kind of love. This is a complete love. He wants the whole world to know about his love for her.

You know, it's a hard thing, isn't it, often for us to get our heads around. But God has always loved his people.

[12 : 25] God has loved his people. The Bible teaches clearly, doesn't it, that in eternity past, say, before creation came into being, God was, God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, made a covenant together.

They made a contract to work a great and loving redemption in his people's lives. Paul, in Ephesians chapter 1, he says, He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. And it would have to be a complete love, wouldn't it?

It would mean fulfilling his holy law. His justice would have to be fully, completely dealt with to adopt us. Justice had to be done.

God's own righteousness has to be fulfilled. Responsibility for the sin of his loved people would, nevertheless, have to be taken on.

[13 : 35] And the burden fully paid for. And as they decided on that in love, in love they knew that it would mean the way of the cross.

In love they did that. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. The Son, in love, he faced the prospect of the cross, didn't he?

And he never said to his Father, you know, I will do anything to love these people, but I won't do that. Looking at the cross, I won't do that. Not my will, but yours be done.

And God the Holy Spirit, he leads him, he empowers him to go to the cross. Because God's love is a complete love. He's willing to pay the full price.

You know, that passage that we looked at with the children earlier, it's a great one, isn't it? You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[14 : 41] The complete price of bearing the responsibility of you and of me. A price paid in blood.

He doesn't pay with money, with credit, with perishable things, but with himself. His own blood. A complete kind of love.

Where he loses his rights, he becomes a man, he dies. He looks at the prospect of the cross and he says, Yes, I'd even do that. I'd even do that.

You know, we're so grateful, aren't we, for people who love us, around us, maybe our family and friends. People who love us in different ways. People who take responsibility for us.

But you know, those people, they will always fall short, won't they, of paying the full price needed to bring us rest and redemption and eternal life. Nothing that they can do, or that I can do, can buy us out, can buy you out of your death.

[15 : 49] If you're in prison, isn't it, they offer a price of bail to be paid. But they cannot pay the bail money on the prison of death.

But God shows his complete love in the Lord Jesus to satisfy our need completely, bring complete security. Only he can take us on.

Only he can pay the full price to afford that. He pays the bail money with his precious blood. God's love is a complete love.

So what a turnaround in Ruth's life. The book, it begins, doesn't it, with misery, with widowhood and death.

The graves of Elimelech and Malon and Chilean, they're left behind, aren't they, in Moab. But it ends, in chapter 4, with happiness and marriage and new life.

[16:50] Just look at verse 13 for a second. Boaz took Ruth, she became his wife. He went into her and the Lord gave her conception. And she bore a son. Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.

The Lord gave her conception. There's a black and white sort of contrast, isn't there? It couldn't be more different at the end than it was at the beginning. And so secondly tonight, God's love is a transforming love.

It's a transforming love. Ruth's love, it becomes totally turned around, doesn't it? Because of this redeeming man. She's brought into the blessings of his house.

Of Boaz's house. Have a look at verse 11 to 12. All the people were there at the gate and the elders said, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming to your house, Boaz, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.

May you act worthily in Ephraim and be renowned in Bethlehem. And may your house be like the house of Peres, who Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

[17:58] You see, in his house, she had a transformed life. Her life is blessed with prayer, isn't it here?

It's blessed with prayer. She is held by prayer, by the petitions of others, for blessing upon her and Boaz's life.

Saints around asking for blessing. Now, hasn't prayer been a driving force behind the circumstances of this book? Prayer has driven the storyline.

It's perhaps not something that we see immediately, is it? But chapter 1, verse 8, Naomi prays, I think, there for Ruth. It is a request, isn't it, to the Lord, that the Lord will deal kindly.

May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you've dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then there's the mutual prayer and encouragement of Boaz and his workers.

[19:03] In chapter 2, isn't it? The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you. Boaz's prayer for Ruth. In chapter 2, verse 12, The Lord repay you for what you have done.

And a full reward be given you by the Lord. Then Naomi's prayer for Boaz. Chapter 2, verse 20, May he be blessed by the Lord. Boaz's prayer for Ruth.

Again in chapter 3, May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. This is a community, isn't it, of people petitioning blessing from the Lord upon each other.

It is a community that saturates events and people's lives with prayer. Where God works through this story as people pray.

Where blessing and redemption for Ruth and Boaz, these individuals, has come through the prayers of the saints, even in such dark times. So Ruth is about providence, isn't it?

[20:07] We love that about Ruth. But you know, it's also about prayer. They're not just sitting back, are they? And letting God show them their fate. But these are saints relying on the Lord in prayer, recognising his sovereignty over their circumstances, calling out for his blessings on each of their difficulties.

It's a transformed life for Ruth. Because we get to the end of the book on the road laid with prayer. And now Ruth and Boaz are showered in prayer, aren't they?

What a transforming thing it is to be in a community of prayer. Prayer is how things have happened. God has worked and blessed and brought things about as his people pray.

God's love has brought her into a community of prayer. And it's a transformed life, isn't it? Of purpose.

Prayer and purpose. Ruth has been given a purpose as part of the kingdom of God. The prayer that she would be, verse 11, like Leah and Rachel, the wives of the patriarch Jacob, who together built

up the house of Israel.

[21 : 21] Ruth has a new purpose. A glorious part to play in a glorious kingdom. And the gift of conception is given to her. God now gives her a part to play in building up God's kingdom.

And he does that through her, through human things like childbirth and relationships and family and children. He gives his people a part to play in his body, to build up his church.

And through those children, Ruth's name will be remembered forever. Her transformed life has permanence.

That desire that we have to make a mark to do something significant, to be remembered, to be remembered forever, even, comes as we're brought into the permanence kingdom of God.

It's a transformed life, isn't it, with eternal significance and purpose and substance. Isn't that why thousands and thousands and thousands of years later, Ruth, the outsider, the nobody, the Moabite, the widow, is remembered.

[22 : 45] Her name, written in the annals of God's word, people she never has even met here tonight, remember her because of God's transforming love for her, a transformed life of her prayer, of purpose and of permanence.

And isn't it lovely, too, that Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, receives the blessings of leading her daughter to the Redeemer. There's an incredible transformation in her life, too, isn't there, in verse 15 to 16.

He shall be to you a restorer of life, a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.

Then Naomi took the child and lay him on her lap and became his nurse. What a turnaround for her, too. A son has been given to you, Naomi, the women say.

Just think back to the end of chapter 1, the people who saw Naomi return from Moab, the scarred, tired-looking Naomi, now pronounce these blessings on her, don't they?

[23 : 57] She is young again, isn't she? She is youthful, even in her old age. The years of waste and of famine and of separation from the Lord in Moab are returned to her.

In Moab she buried her child, didn't she? But in Bethlehem she nurses a child. Through this Redeemer, the years of the past have wasted years, perhaps, the years that maybe we look back on with regret, the years that we've hurt others or we've been hurt by others, the years in which we've been scarred, that have robbed us of our zeal, our youthfulness for life.

they can be restored, can't they? Even in old age. Because God's love is a transforming love.

There's a great analogy by Martin Luther who illustrates the gospel as if a great king were to go to a slum and find a woman and she's in the worst state possible and take her from the squalor of the pavement to live in the palace.

And one of the things that hopefully has struck us as we've looked at this book is how it deals with the very unexpected kind of love that God shows through this Redeemer.

It is a relationship, isn't it, that should never really have happened in the first place where the excluded Moabite is included through the mercy and kindness of this Jew.

[25 : 36] It is a redemption of an outsider. And so it is lastly, isn't it, and probably most starkly, it is a love which is an unexpected love.

An unexpected love. As the book closes, there are reminders, aren't there, that we should really always expect the unexpected from God's love.

So in the last four verses or so, we get the family tree of Boaz, don't we? And it's headed up there by Perez, and it ends with David, the great king.

Now Perez is also mentioned earlier, isn't he, by the praying women in verse 12, as the great descendant of Judah. Do you remember Judah, the great man?

What a titan of godliness he was, wasn't he? Well, no. Perez, he was the child of Judah when he got his own daughter-in-law pregnant in Genesis chapter 38, because she posed as a prostitute.

[26 : 49] Perez is not the kind of person you'd expect to be on a royal family tree, and celebrated as being so. But isn't he one of so many unexpected people that God has chosen, and loved, and used?

Think of the children of Adam, Cain and Abel. Cain should inherit, he is strong, he's the firstborn, but God chooses Abel. Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac.

Ishmael is the firstborn, he should be next in the family line, God chooses Isaac. Isaac's sons Esau and Jacob, Esau is the one who stands to inherit, God chooses Jacob.

Jacob's sons again, Reuben is the firstborn, but the covenant promises fall on Judah and then to Perez. We should by now in the Bible, shouldn't we be seeing the pattern that God's love and choice of his people is an unexpected love.

And you wonder, don't you, that Boaz knows, whose own mother, we're told in Matthew chapter 1, was Rahab, Rahab the prostitute, who herself had been brought in to God's people as a foreigner.

[28 : 08] You think maybe Boaz has learnt that lesson from seeing his own mother. Boaz understands that this is the way that God works, by choosing and bringing in nobodies, by loving outsiders, by redeeming them, by paying for them to be amongst his people.

We expect the unexpected with God's love, that he would choose even us tonight to be united with his son, his redeemer.

God's book, it twinkles, doesn't it, in such a dark place in the Bible, and it shines, and it says to us, you are never too far away, you are never in too dark a place to come back to him tonight.

It isn't a usual royal family tree, is it, but it's God's royal family tree. It leads to David at the end there, and it leads eventually to the great king, king of kings, king Jesus, the most unexpected king of them all, the king of God's kingdom, who loves us in such an unexpected way, the overwhelming and complete love that he shows us upon the cross.

So, you know, as we finish this, but for now anyway, we ought to read it really, we ought to read Ruth, and trust in Christ and feel loved.

[29 : 54] We ought to see a picture of the love that we have in and through our redeemer, the Lord Jesus. If we're trusting in him, I wonder how we usually think God feels towards us.

The Lord judges me, it's true, perhaps the Lord is disappointed with me, the Lord tests me, or perhaps more now, the Lord loves me, the Lord loves me, because we know, don't we, that he means business, that it's not a fly by night kind of love, this is a complete love, love, and he's taken you on, to transform you, amongst his praying people, for the glorious purpose of his praise, forever and ever.

Let's close and pray together.