

Ruth 4:1-10

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Preacher: David Hills

[0 : 00] Do you want to be remembered? I think all of us really want to be remembered. Have you ever feared going to a school reunion or maybe visiting your neighborhood and realizing maybe the neighborhood where you grew up and realizing that there's no one there who remembers you?

Or conversely, have you ever had someone come up to you on the street and call you by name and you just can't remember them? Even when they give you their name, you still can't remember them. We especially seem to want to be remembered after our deaths. We place heavy stone grave markers with names and dates engraved to remember and to be remembered.

A few years ago, my wife and I visited the North Hamptonshire villages of Upper and Lower Boddington. Now, if you've never heard of them, don't be surprised. It's only a small cluster of houses in each. But it was not far from Banbury.

My great-grandfather, John Edmonds, had been born there. And the church records show that the records of births and deaths and marriages show that my family had been there from at least the mid-1700s.

Yet when we got to the churchyard, there was only one stone that we could find with the name Edmonds on it. And that was a World War II memorial in the churchyard that commemorated a distant cousin who had died in World War II. All the other stones had been wiped clean by the wind, by the rain, and by time.

[1 : 35] And just yesterday, we were in Portsmouth, and we stopped by the Royal Garrison Church. In the yard there, there were many similar stones, all wiped clean. And there was one stone that we passed that said, sacred to the memory of. And that was all it said. The name, the dates, they were all gone.

Yet everyone wants to be remembered. Many of us think we're important enough to actually be remembered. I once worked with such a man, one who loved to drop names. The names of the generals and other important people that he knew.

And one day, I was given the task of acting as a host for some very important visitors to our building. My boss was going to be traveling. He wasn't going to be there that day. But a couple of days earlier, he looked at the guest list. He said, Oh, I know him. And I know him. I know him. Please give my regards to each of them.

So during the course of their visit, I would go up to each of those that he had mentioned. And I said, Colonel so-and-so sends his regards. And they would look at me kind of blankly and say, Who? It wasn't so much, Who did he know? But who knew him? How many times in the scriptures do we read of the importance of remembering?

[3 : 02] God set the rainbow in the sky as a reminder of his covenantal promise never again to destroy the earth with a flood. He established Passover as a day of remembrance that the Lord delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.

And of course, the Lord suffered this due in remembrance of me. Over and over again, we're commanded to remember the Lord, to remember his day, to remember his deliverance. And to remember the wonderful works that he has done. As we saw last week, one of the reasons for a brother marrying his brother's widow is to raise up a son in the man's name so that the man's name might not be blotted out from the land of Israel so that he might be remembered.

Remember, remembrance is certainly one of the themes of the book of Ruth. But Naomi and Elimelech had fled from Israel to Moab to escape a famine, not remembering God's promises and his provisions.

Elimelech died. His two married sons died. Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, a Moabite, an outsider. And as you recall, Ruth dedicated herself to Naomi, to

Naomi's people, to Naomi's land, and to Naomi's God.

[4 : 26] And Ruth went out to the fields to glean at harvest time. And God miraculously led Ruth to the field of Boaz, who took her under his wing. And last week, we saw Ruth approach Boaz in his role as redeemer, to buy back, to redeem the land, to provide Ruth with a husband.

And Boaz calls her worthy, a woman of integrity, and tells her that while he is not the nearest kinsman, he would certainly see the matter settled. And as chapter 3 came to an end, we were sitting on the edge of our seats.

What will Boaz do? What will happen to Ruth? Boaz has promised to settle the matter, but how? We've gotten to know Boaz.

We've gotten to know Ruth. We've seen their character. But what will happen next? Will we see Ruth married off to someone else? How will this be resolved?

And how will Ruth and Boaz be remembered? Well, as we move into chapter 4, then, we see Boaz at the gate of the city. He's watching.

[5 : 31] He's waiting. Everyone comes by the gate at some point. But almost immediately, it seems, this nearer kinsman comes into view. The redeemer that Boaz had mentioned to Ruth the night before.

And Boaz calls to him. Turn aside, Poloni al-Mani, and have a seat. Poloni al-Mani. You won't find that in your translations.

But that's the Hebrew. And your translation probably says, turn aside, friend. Or if you have an older translation, like the King James, it might say, oh, such a one.

Turn aside. The translation is challenging here. It's clearly not a name. And it might actually be translated, a certain someone. A paraphrase could say, just the man I'm looking for.

One modern translation just calls him Mr. So-and-so. But Boaz certainly knew him. And it was likely a friendly greeting.

[6 : 30] But it is interesting that his name isn't mentioned. It's not recorded. It's not remembered. And so this unnamed redeemer comes over and sits down. He likely had no idea of the reason for this meeting.

And then Boaz collects ten more men. Elders of the city. A sort of jury. Witnesses to the discussion that was about to take place.

You have to wonder what was running through this redeemer's mind as he sees this group gathering. But also, you wonder what was in Boaz's mind. Had he spent the night thinking about this conversation?

Had he planned it carefully, hoping for a particular outcome? Again, the text doesn't give us an answer. But Boaz certainly considered Ruth to be a very worthy woman.

An excellent woman. And he would see the matter settled. So, with a full set of witnesses and probably a crowd forming around to listen, Boaz makes an announcement.

[7 : 29] Naomi, who has come back from the land, from the country of Moab, is selling a parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. Naomi, the widow, needs money.

She can't afford to hold on to that land that had been her husband's. Now, land is valuable, especially in Bethlehem, known for its wheat and its barley. And the fields can provide income for many years.

But Naomi must sell it. She can't work it herself. She can't afford to hire anyone. She has no husbands. She has no sons. So, Boaz tells us, the near kinsman, redeemer, I thought I would tell you about it.

Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, in the presence of the elders of my people. And if you will redeem it, then redeem it. But if you will not, let me know. There's no one else besides you.

And I'm next in line. As the nearest kinsman redeemer, you have first rights. And you have an obligation to redeem this land. Give her a fair price in front of these witnesses.

[8 : 33] But let's keep the land in the family. And Boaz admits that he, too, has an interest in buying the land. If you won't redeem it, I will. But such an offer.

A valuable piece of land in exchange for taking care of Omalek's widow for a few years. I mean, she's too old to have any more children. And once she dies, the land would be his.

To add to his own inheritance. His own fortune. To pass on to his children. He quickly does the calculations. How much can an old woman really eat? And how much room would she take up?

A little inconvenience for a couple of years. In exchange for a valuable piece of land. Sure, I'll redeem it. Then Boaz lets the other shoe drop.

The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabite. The widow of the dead. In order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.

[9 : 33] It was almost as if Mr. So-and-so had been oblivious to what was going on with Ruth and Naomi. He might have not been paying attention. He certainly was not as interested in Ruth as Boaz had been.

And suddenly the calculation had changed. Ruth was still young. An additional mouth to feed for many more years. But even more importantly, he would have to marry her.

Another wife, presumably. Now there would be conflict there, certainly. A foreigner living in his house. A potential son. One who would be the heir, not to his land, but to a limelight.

The land would not be added to his own estate. But to the estate of that potential son of Ruth. He would have all the responsibilities. But none of the benefits. And he quickly changed his answer.

Now Deuteronomy 25 anticipates a brother who refuses to raise up a son in his brother's name.

Starting with verse 7 of Deuteronomy 25 we read, And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders.

[10 : 42] And say, my husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel. He will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me. Then the elders of the city shall call to him and speak to him.

And if he persists, saying, I do not wish to take her, then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit it in his face.

And she shall answer and say, so shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house. And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, the house of him who had his sandal pulled off.

Yet this doesn't seem to be the case here. After all, this is not a brother. The man is a near kinsman, certainly. A redeemer, absolutely. But not a brother.

Of course, one might always ask, who is my brother? But that's a topic for another sermon. Instead, Ruth 4.7 gives us a different explanation. Because it says, Now this was the custom in former times in Israel, concerning redeeming and exchanging.

[11 : 48] To confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other. And this was the manner of attesting in Israel. It was a way of finalizing a land deal. Now it's been suggested that this custom may have been related to the promise in Joshua 1.3, where God says, Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, I have given you, just as I promised Moses.

And the two explanations may even be somewhat related. But the text really seems to focus more on the custom than on the law. And apparently, by the time the book of Ruth was actually written, the custom was no longer a common one.

Because as we see in the text here, it had to be explained to the readers. Regardless, though, the near kinsman refused to marry Ruth. He refused to take on the responsibility of raising a son for her.

So Boaz settled the matter, just as he had promised. He would redeem Ruth. Starting with verse 9, it says, Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the land of Naomi all that belong to Elimelech, and all that belong to Kilion and Malon. Also, Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Malon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead might not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place.

[13 : 15] You are witnesses this day. Boaz took full responsibility for Naomi and for Ruth, a lifelong commitment and an expensive one.

And he did that without shying away from the cost. It's interesting, this part of chapter 4 is clearly focused, though, on perpetuating the name, that the name of the dead might not be cut out of the land.

It's interesting, the book of Ruth is a book of ironies, as we said some weeks ago, a book of contrasts. Naomi went away full and returned empty.

Orpah returned to her family and her land and her gods, while Ruth abandoned all of that for Naomi, for Naomi's people, for Naomi's land, for Naomi's God.

Ruth goes out into the fields destitute, hoping for a few handfuls of grain, to return home with a bag full of barley. Ruth comes to Bethlehem, a foreigner, an outcast, but is declared worthy.

[14 : 24] And then we meet this near kinsman redeemer, a man who considers his own interests, his own financial well-being, over any responsibilities to perpetuate the name of his kinsman.

A man doing what was right in his own eyes. But who is this man? We don't know. We don't even know his name.

A certain someone, a Mr. So-and-so, a man whose responsibility it was to raise up a son so that Elimelech's name and Malon's name would not be forgotten.

Yet his name is the one that is forgotten in history. As we look back, even Orpah, Naomi's other daughter-in-law, the one who left and returned to Moab, is mentioned by name.

But this man, who was so careful to protect his own estate, his own fortunes, his name is intentionally deleted from the annals of history. So Naomi, the Israelite, had left Bethlehem, the house of bread, to seek provision in a foreign land, a land away from God.

[15 : 35] She went out full. She came back in empty. No husband, no sons, a foreign daughter-in-law in tow. We have Ruth, the Moabitess, from a race despised by Israel, a race cursed by God, an outsider with no claim to the grace and mercy of God.

Ruth, who left her own people, her own land, her own family, and her own gods, and followed Naomi to Bethlehem, to the promised land, to the land of God's covenant, to embrace Naomi's people as her own, to adopt Naomi's land as her own, and to seek Naomi's God as her God.

Ruth, who went out to the fields destitute and came back in full. Let's return briefly to Proverbs 31 that we discussed last week. The description of the worthy woman, the excellent woman, the virtuous woman, the woman whose value is above rubies and above jewels.

As we look closely at the proverb, we see that this was an oracle given to the king by his own mother. We see a description of an ideal wife, a royal wife, a wife suitable for a king.

From verses 10 to verse 29, we see that she is industrious, she is hardworking, she is astute, but she is not praised for those things. She is praised because she loves and obeys the Lord.

[17 : 05] In parallel, we see Ruth, industrious, hardworking, wise and astute, and a woman who trusts in the Lord. Proverbs 3, 5 and 6 says, Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct your path. He certainly directed Ruth's path. Proverbs 31 only mentions her husband once.

Verse 23 says, Her husband is known at the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. A man of note in the city. A man recognized as a leader. A wise man who sits among the elders.

A royal man. Now we compare this with Boaz. A worthy man. A man of integrity. A man of position. A man recognized at the gates.

An insider. A man who cares for a stranger. A man who cares for this particular stranger. Not because of who she is or because of what she brings.

[18 : 11] For indeed, she brings nothing. But because of who he is. Boaz loves Ruth and sacrifices for her. A man worthy of a worthy woman.

You see, Boaz was under no obligation to assist Ruth. He was under no obligation to marry her. He risked his own reputation as a matter of fact marrying a Moabite.

And surely there were many needy women in Bethlehem that he could have helped. And there were many eligible women in Bethlehem that he could have married. But he chose Ruth.

Boaz, the insider, risked becoming an outsider. He risked the ire, the rejection of his own community to bring this outsider into that community.

Into that covenant community. Does this sound like any other story we know? We spoke earlier in the series about shadows, about types, of how the stories in the Old Testament often point forward to give us hints of what God's going to do in history.

[19 : 21] For indeed, all of us are outsiders to God. All of us are descendants of Adam who first broke God's law.

We have nothing to commend ourselves. Indeed, we are cursed for our rebellion against God. Yet God, in the person of Jesus Christ, the ultimate perfect insider, became the ultimate outsider.

He became cursed. For cursed is anyone hanged on a tree. Yet He died on the cross for us that we might become insiders.

2 Corinthians 5.21 says, For our sake He made Him to become sin who knew no sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

The perfectly righteous God sent His own Son, His own eternal sinless Son, Jesus Christ, to take on human flesh and to die to be our Redeemer.

[20 : 23] And as a result, our names can be written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Let us pray.