

Ruth 4

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to Ruth chapter 4. Ruth chapter 4, it's on page 224 if you've got a church Bible. And there's a really famous photograph from 1972.

! It's a Pulitzer Prize winning photograph. And many believe that that photograph put an end to the Vietnam War. Some of you will have seen it, most of you will have.

It's of a little girl running down the street naked in pain. Her eyes are squeezed tight with terror. It was one of the most disturbing pictures, one of the most poignant snapshots of the Vietnam War. 24 years later, that same young lady was standing at the podium in the Vietnam Veteran Memorial in Washington.

It was Veterans Day. And as a child, Kim Yook brought home to Americans the horror of war. But 24 years later, she's a grown woman at that ceremony.

[1 : 10] And she brings a very different lesson. It's the lesson of the Book of Ruth. The healing power of forgiveness. As she laid a wreath against the wall.

And Kim told the assembled crowd of war veterans, these are her words, As you know, I am the little girl in that photograph. I'm the little girl who was running down the road, running to escape from the napalm fire.

I've suffered a lot from both physical and emotional pain. There were times when I thought I couldn't live. But God saved my life. And gave me faith and hope. How did that happen?

Well, soon after the infamous photo was taken, Kim was rushed to hospital by the Associated Press photographer who'd taken the picture. And years of painful therapy followed.

After the war, she'd enrolled in Saigon University, hoping to study medicine. But she was far too valuable, a propaganda tool for the communist government. She was put to work in a government office.

[2 : 16] And eventually, she was sent on a goodwill visit to Cuba in 1996. And while she was in Cuba, she fell in love with a man. They got married. He became a Christian.

And she became a Christian. And eventually, both of them managed to defect. And this is what she said more recently on national radio. She told of her plans to go to Bible college that she and her husband had so that they could go and spread the good news amongst the Vietnamese people. As she shared the message of forgiveness to thousands of toughened soldiers on that Veterans Day ceremony, she publicly forgave the pilot whose load had scarred her skin and killed her two younger brothers.

It's reported that at that moment, many hardened war veterans began to weep. Now, why do I tell you that story?

What is the moral of that story? And this is it. It's that there is no limit to the reach of God's forgiveness. There's no limit to the kindness of God.

[3 : 21] This book, this 3,000-year-old story set in the days of the judges, in days just like ours, days of overwhelming spiritual apostasy, moral anarchy.

This little story, the key word in the story is that word kindness. It's God's loving kindness, God's steadfast love, his covenant love.

It is the heart of God that we see in this lovely little story. And so for many, for many, what they would have considered to be a hopeless situation, an insignificant, nameless girl running down a road in Vietnam, God began to restore the nation.

And on that bleak day when Kim lost her family and was herself engulfed in flames, she would not have been able to predict, would she? Not in a million years, the unlikely outcome of her ordeal. She would never have guessed that through a series of seemingly chance events, she would somehow come to know God's love herself.

[4 : 30] And she would be able to shelter under the wings of the God of Israel. She would never have guessed that she herself would become a messenger of God's grace to share God's love with others, which he's still doing to this day.

And through her testimony, many have discovered for themselves what it is to take refuge in Jesus as their redeemer. That's the story of Ruth, really.

If you had asked an Israelite then, back in the days of the judges, where is your God? What has happened to the promise that he made to Abraham? That you people would be a blessing to the whole earth?

What's happened to that? Where is your God? What's happening to your covenant promises? I very much doubt they would have pointed to a little Moabite girl called Ruth. But that is where God was working out his purposes.

Somebody has called the book of Ruth the love story that changed the world. And that's no exaggeration. If you were making a film out of it, you'd call it Three Weddings and a Funeral.

[5 : 37] Chapter 1, there are three funerals. Elimelech and his two sons, Marlon and Cilion. There's three graves in Moab. But it ends with a wedding.

And Boaz marries Ruth. And out of this marriage comes King David, who was the great grandson of Ruth and Boaz. And from David, of course, comes Jesus. David's greatest son.

And of course, he is the reason why you're here this morning. Who would have thought that a story 3,000 years old, a tiny little volume that you can miss, can't you, as you skip through the Bible, it's just four or five pages.

That's the reason why you're here. It's a story about the Lord Jesus. It's a story of redemption. Like every story in the Bible, it points to Jesus as our kinsman and regimem.

So I've got three things to say to you. And the story is, first of all, a story of costly redemption. It's a story of costly redemption.

[6 : 43] So, do you remember? Ruth, at Naomi's instigation, Naomi, the interfering mother in all, but not really. She's a godly lady. She's got Ruth's best interest at heart.

Ruth, at Naomi's instigation, has proposed to Boaz in a cornfield in the middle of the night. And in asking Boaz to marry her, according to the laws of Israel, she's invoking the principle of a kinsman redeemer.

She's asking him, not only to be her husband, but be the one who will redeem and rescue my family. Who will give me a future and a hope in Israel.

And as we've seen, Boaz is more than willing to do this. In fact, he's determined to do it properly or not to do it at all. So do you notice, in verse 1, he goes up to the gate, doesn't he?

He goes to the town hall, the hub of that community. That's where the town councillors met to transact their business. The finance matters. All sorts of issues were settled at the town gate.

[7 : 47] It's not a matter, Boaz is saying, to be settled in the middle of a cornfield in the middle of night. It should be done publicly in accordance with God's law in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

And the law provided that a close relative could marry a widow. There's no welfare payments, no social security, or anything like that.

3,000 years ago in Israel, but there was a very rich and generous provision. in the law of God for people who were destitute, for people who were marginalised, people who'd lost everything, the law allowed a close relative to marry into the family, to marry the widow, to produce offspring, to whom the property rights would be transferred, the debts would be taken on.

And so up to this point in the story, everybody's hoping it's going to be Boaz. But the path of true love is seldom smooth. We find out, didn't we, in chapter 3 last week, there's been a complication. It's complicated. In fact, there is a closer relative than Boaz. There's somebody higher up the queue. And so verse 1, can you see it?

[9 : 05] Of chapter 4, now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, it just so happened. We've seen that many times in the book of Ruth. Behold, the Redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by.

Boaz grabs hold of him and challenges him before witnesses to fulfill his duty. So he says, verse 3, he said to the Redeemer, Naomi, who's come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech.

So I thought I would tell you about it. I'd say, buy it in the presence of those sitting here. There's witnesses in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will

not, tell me that I may know.

For there's no one besides you to redeem it and I come after you. What's he going to say? Well, the man says, I'll redeem it.

I'm in. But do you notice who Boaz hasn't mentioned yet? He's not mentioned Ruth yet, has he? He's just spoken in terms of the parcel of land of prophets.

[10:17] And obviously, this nameless Redeemer, he's a guy with an eye for a bargain. This could be a nice little earner. Naomi is an old lady. She's not going to have any children.

If I marry Naomi, well, the land will become mine automatically. When Naomi dies, she's not going to have a son. She's not going to have somebody who will be able to reclaim their inheritance.

And the land would become automatically mine. It's a nice little earner. It sounds like a good investment, a good option. But then Boaz plays his trump card. Look what he says.

He says, did I mention Ruth? Did I mention Ruth, the Moabitess? And I think the writer of the story is emphasizing something there.

Did I mention Ruth, the foreigner? Ruth, the Moabitess, who's come to Israel. She comes as part of the deal. She comes as part of the property. So, verse 5.

[11:17] And the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance. Now it's not looking such a good deal.

Ruth, by all accounts, is a very attractive young woman. She's likely to have children of her own.

And he doesn't mind buying the land. But there's no commercial advantage to marrying Ruth.

And so he backs out. He says the deal is off. And he takes off his sandal. It's a bit strange to us. He hands it to Boaz. But that is the legal way of transferring property in Israel.

It's the equivalent of signing a contract, of shaking on the deal. He's relinquishing his rights to the land. And then we're told, verse 9. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, you are witnesses this day that I've bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Emelach, all that belonged to Kilian and Malon, and Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Malon.

I bought to be my wife. There's such a contrast, isn't there, between the two redeemers. Boaz was not the closest relative. He had no obligation to buy the land.

[12:30] He had no obligation to marry Ruth. He didn't have to do that. There was another relative who was more closely connected with the family. He could have walked away. But he freely chose to do this.

He freely chose to bear the cost, to take on the responsibility. And of course, that's the real difference, isn't it, between a real redeemer and a false redeemer.

So, remember the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, he talked about himself as the good shepherd. The good shepherd, the great shepherd who comes and lays down his life for the sheep. And he contrasts that in the Gospels with the hirelings who were only in it for what they could get out of it. They don't care about the sheep. They're only in it for the money. And that's the contrast between Boaz and this other man. This other man is only in it for what he can squeeze out for himself. He's not concerned with the plight of these two widowed women.

He's not concerned with their future in Israel. It didn't enter into his thinking at all, but not so with Boaz. He acts out of unselfish, sacrificial love.

[13:43] It's not usually what we mean by love. But the key word here is the word hesed. That's covenant love.

It's hard to put it into English. Somebody has called it love with Velcro, which is quite a good way of putting it. Covenant love is not lust.

It's not infatuation. It's not hormones raging through the body in testosterone. Alec Mateer puts it like this. He says, covenant love, it is the wonderful love that combines the warmth of God's fellowship with the security of God's faithfulness.

And that's a lovely unpacking of that word. It's like the wonderful love that combines the warmth of God's fellowship with the security of God's faithfulness, the security of God's faithfulness.

And that's what Ruth has come to expect by sheltering under the wings of God. And that's what Boaz knew and experienced in his life. He knew what it was to trust in the God of Israel.

[14:56] And you see that covenant love and covenant faithfulness supremely in Jesus. And Boaz is a prototype of Jesus.

You know what a prototype is? It's not the real thing. But it points to the real thing. It points to what the real thing is and how it will function. And Boaz is not Jesus.

He points to Jesus. And so Spurgeon calls Jesus our glorious Boaz. Do you remember what Jesus said in the gospel? The Son of Man has come into the world.

This broken, fallen, damaged world. The Son of Man has come into this world not to be served but to serve. That's the difference between Jesus and all these other redeemers.

Difference between Jesus and all these other gods out there. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. To pay the price.

[15:59] The ultimate price that would redeem us and sell us free from our sin and give us a future. Our glorious Boaz the Son of Man he looked down the corridors of eternity and he saw you and me in our plight.

Just like Boaz saw Ruth in her plight and his heart was moved for us willingly and freely. And it wasn't robbery for him to claim equality with God. He could have stayed in the glory couldn't he but he willingly and he freely took the form of a servant and became obedient unto death even death on a cross.

He paid the ultimate price. From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. with his own blood he bought her and for her sake he died.

Because as we see at the Lord's table redemption is costly. There's a price to pay and when the moment comes and the price for our rescue has to be paid we're told Jesus sell his face like a flint to Jerusalem.

He didn't back out. He didn't hesitate. He didn't linger. He didn't withhold anything he gave of himself freely and willingly. He went to the cross.

[17:19] How willing was Jesus to die that we fellow sinners might live? The life they could not take away.

How willing was Jesus to give? And freely and willingly he dies on the cross and with his last breath he cries out doesn't he?

Tatalestai it is finished. Not I am finished. It's a business term at the cross. He's not saying I am finished.

He cried out with a loud voice it is paid for. Campbell Morgan he was a minister in London in the kind of early part of the 20th century and he was preaching in South Wales in a coal mining village. And he spoke of the salvation that is offered to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke to this man and he said there is nothing that you have to do.

[18:17] There is nothing you can do but receive it. That's all you've got to do. I think it's one of the many things that keeps people from becoming a Christian.

The person said but surely that's just too easy isn't it? It's too good to be true. Surely I've got to do something. Surely I've got to make some contribution.

Surely I'll have to pay something. Campbell Morgan said to him tell me how did you go down into the mine underground this morning? Man said I went down on the lift.

He said well that must have cost you something wasn't it? Man said well no it didn't cost me a thing. Well isn't that too easy? Didn't you have to pay to go down in the lift?

Wasn't there a cost to pay? The man said well no it didn't cost me a thing. The man said it cost the company to have that lift installed. It cost the company an awful lot to have that lift installed but it didn't cost me a thing.

[19:20] It's precisely. And salvation is free. It is not cheap. But it is free. It cost me nothing.

It cost him everything. It cost God his own beloved son. We have redemption through his blood. And so that's the first thing.

It's a story of costly redemption but secondly it's a story of surprising grace. Surprising grace. Look at verses 11 and 12. There's a prayer in there.

In fact I'm not really sure whether it's a prayer or testimony meeting in verses 11 and 12. But after the ceremony the witnesses who've witnessed the transaction they pray in verses 11 and 12.

And you might have noticed that Ruth actually is laced with all these little prayers all the way through it. And here are the witnesses the town counsellors and they're praying and they pray for Ruth you notice in verses 11 and 12.

[20:20] And they pray don't they that she might become like Rachel and Leah the founding mothers of Israel who produced enormous amounts of children. And then Ruth the Moabitess this

pagan girl who comes from a place where they used to sacrifice their children to Chemosh this girl who used to worship other gods and now these elders are praying for Ruth the Moabitess that she would become like Rachel and Leah the founding mothers of Israel.

And they pray for Boaz for his name to be honoured where in Bethlehem Ephrathah. And they pray for this little family may your family be like that of Perez who Terah brought to Judah.

And Perez was the result of the same kind of marriage that Ruth and Boaz would have a Levirate marriage marrying the brothers widow. And he was one of Boaz ancestors.

It's easy for us to forget with all these wonderful sentiments being expressed in this little prayer meeting that this is Ruth the Moabitess a childless widow from a despised foreign tribe and now her name is up there in lights with Rachel and Leah.

But not only that look at verse 15 there's something shocking about that. In chapter one when they turned up the people were whispering behind their hands about Ruth and Naomi.

[21 : 59] But now look what they say in verse 15. He shall be to you a restorer of life and nourisher of your old age for your daughters-in-law who loves you who is more to you who is more valuable than seven sons.

That is a really radical thing to say in the patriarchal culture of Ruth. When having lots of sons was seen to be a great blessing from the Lord and seven is the perfect number.

And so do you see what they're saying to Naomi? Ruth is better to you than an infinite number of men. That's a radical thing to say 3,000 years ago. In Israel.

Isn't that surprising? You didn't see that one coming. In a day when women were nobodies, do you see what God does here? God recruits the women. And he recruits a widow and a foreigner from a despised race.

And he recruits her for a leading role in the unfolding of his eternal purposes. She is, as it were, spliced into the line of David, the great king, and ultimately into the line of Jesus.

[23 : 14] Because when you come to the New Testament, Ruth turns up on the first page. The racial outsider, the poor widow, the outcast, she's identified with the name that is above every name.

And isn't that God's grace? It's outrageous, it's surprising, it's no wonder we sing amazing grace. Ruth the Moabitess becomes one of the mothers of Jesus.

And so family trees in Jesus' day normally only included the names of men, but Jesus' genealogy has got four women in it. Bathsheba, Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth.

Ruth the Moabitess, four shady ladies, as one commented it calls them. It's probably a bit unfair. And yet they've got a history. And grace has put them in the Saviour's family.

And grace can do that for you today, whatever your background. Whatever skeletons are rattling around in your cupboard, God's kindness is so wonderful that it can put you in the Saviour's family.

[24 : 27] So listen to what Paul says, the mercy of God extends beyond the boundaries of race or class or gender or culture or ethnicity. It isn't restricted to the rich and powerful.

No, it's a kingdom of grace is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians. Think of what you were, he says to the church. He says, when you were called, not many of you were wise according to the worldly standards. There's not many PhDs in the Corinthian church, not many influential politicians, not many of noble birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

God is God's grace, that is what he does. Sometimes I think we are tempted to think that God could never really use me.

God couldn't use us because we don't meet the kind of index of worldly success. And we look around this room and we just think, well, I'm just a nobody.

[25 : 48] We're just nothings. sometimes we think God could never use a person like me because we don't match up to our own expectations, let alone the expectations of others. And we feel God couldn't possibly use a person like me.

But we mustn't forget God's surprising grace. Jacob was a cheater. Peter had a temper. David had an affair.

Noah got drunk. Jonah ran from God. Paul was a murderer. Gideon was insecure. Miriam was a gossip. Martha was a worrier. Thomas was a doubter.

Sarah was impatient. Elijah was depressed. Moses stuttered. Zacchaeus was short. Abraham was old. And Lazarus was dead. That's how God works.

God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called. God's God's God. And that's what he does. It's all of grace so that no one would boast.

[26 : 53] And so whoever you are this morning, and wherever you're from, and whatever your background, and whatever your baggage, and whatever your story, your life becomes significant as it is taken up into the greater story of the Lord Jesus himself.

And that's the story of Ruth. It's a story of costly redemption. It's a story of surprising grace. And then lastly, it's a story of joyful restoration. Some people read the end of Ruth and they think it's a little bit Disney-esque.

The girl gets the guy, they have a baby, they all live happily ever after. That only ever happens in fairy tales, doesn't it? So if you write a modern play and you give it a happy ending, the critics laugh at you.

They say it's superficial and unrealistic. Real life isn't like that. It's only like that in fairy tales that people live happily ever after, or is it? Why is it that fairy tales end that way?

Why do you think fairy tales reflect that? What do you think fairy tales are trying to tell us? There is an echo of something there, isn't there?

[28 : 10] There is an echo of what this book is telling us, of what the Bible is telling us, that in the end, that in the end, God's people can look forward to the restoration of all things in Jesus Christ.

And that is how the story ends. And it comes back full circle to show how God restores. The years that the locusts have eaten, God can restore. And when God renews his people, when they put their trust in him, let me just point that out for you, he restores Ruth and Naomi from emptiness to fullness.

Do you remember chapter 1? Ruth and Naomi, they came back to Bethlehem and Naomi says, don't call me Naomi, I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty, call me bitter.

But now chapter 14, can you see what she says? The women say to Naomi, blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned for by all in Israel.

He shall be to you a restorer of life, a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who's more to you than seven sons has given birth to him. She's renewed, there's a sparkle in her eyes again, she's restored.

[29 : 26] She's returned to Bethlehem empty, but now she's come full in chapter 4. God has answered her prayers. The woman who despaired of ever having grandchildren has got a little baby on her lap.

He's filling Naomi's emptiness, and you can see the sparkle in her eyes. As she gazes down at this little bundle on her knee, she's no longer bitter anymore, the old Naomi is back again.

It's embarrassing at the end of chapter 1 when they go back from Moab. They can't even recognize it. They say, is this really Naomi? Ten years have taken their toll. But now the years that the locusts have eaten have been restored from emptiness to fullness, from prayer to praise, because what you have here in verse 13 is answered prayer, isn't it?

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and he went into her and the Lord gave her conception. And she bore a child. I think in verse 13 there is a clue that Ruth had struggled to conceive.

I think that's the most obvious reading of verse 13. For ten years she'd known the pain of not being able to conceive with Malon. And so Naomi in chapter 1 verse 8 urges her daughter's in-law to go back to Moab.

[30 : 54] That's part of her prayer. And it's a mixture of good and bad, that desire. It's mixed, but she prays and she urges them to go back to Moab, which is not a good thing, but she wants them to find rest and security in her husband and in her family and she prays for them and God has answered that prayer now.

There's a high priest at God's right hand. We've got a friend in high places. What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to pay. What a privilege to carry everything to him in prayer.

He cleans up our prayers, if I can put it like that. He can make sense of our confusion, like Naomi's confusion in chapter 1. He can improve what we bring to God in prayer.

He's given us the spirit of adoption who groans with us in our pain and our suffering, who makes sense of our intercession. And that's what's happening here. He takes our poor and misguided prayers and he improves them and he answers them in ways we never thought possible. And that's what he does for Ruth. The Lord enabled her to conceive. Verse 13, the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. And so the line of Elimelech, which everybody thought had dried up and died out, is now restored.

[32 : 14] And Ruth and Boaz are not so much starting a family as they're rescuing a family. It's a story of redemption and restoration from full, from empty to full, from prayer to praise.

And then lastly, from chaos to Christ. Because as I've kept reminding you, this happened in the days of the judges. A day when Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

And it was an individualistic, hedonistic society. It was a society that had made peace with sexual brutality and criminal violence. Where might was right, where the law of the jungle prevailed.

That is how it was in the days of the judges. If you don't believe me, just read it. It's an X-rated book. And that's how it was in the days of judges, how it is in our society today.

Where everyone does what is right in their own eyes, and we will have no king in Israel. We will not have this king to rule over us. We will not have God telling us how to run our lives.

[33 : 21] And God says, you shall not. And we say, I don't care, God, what you're saying, I'm going to do it anyway. That's what sin is. It is rebellion against the God who created us.

And he gave us such a wonderful environment to flourish in. And he set the parameters for human flourishing, and we just take our puny little fist and we shake it in his face.

Elimelech, what does that mean? It means my God is king. What did Elimelech do? He wandered into Moab. He rejected God as the rightful ruler of his life.

And isn't that what you have done? What? Haven't you done that? Isn't that what the world has done? Because the world is made up of people like you and I?

And we've brought upon ourselves to the brink of eternal ruin. And we can no more rescue ourselves this morning than Naomi could.

[34 : 22] And we need help from outside. Outside of the human race. We need a redeemer who will come and restore us and rescue us and save us.

that's precisely what these verses promise us. Because it's almost as if isn't it in verse 18 somebody has pressed fast forward on the DVD.

And suddenly we're nine months on and Naomi is cradling a grandchild and before you know it somebody's pressed the fast forward button again and you're three generations down the track and there's a king in Israel, King David.

Israel's greatest king. And if you keep your finger on the fast forward button do you know where you find yourself? in the fields of this little town of Bethlehem, Ephrathah.

And you hear the sound of angels saying today is born unto you this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

[35 : 23] And that's where this story is pointing us from emptiness to fullness, from prayer to praise, from chaos to Christ. Christ. And we are living in a society and in a time that is struggling to find a new morality that will allow almost anything to happen.

And this story points you away from the chaos of our world to Christ. And ultimately of course to the restoration of all things when Christ returns.

and the universe will be restored to its original settings. And then indeed we will all live happily ever after in the new heavens and the new earth.

Thank you.