

# Ruth 4:1-13

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Date: 12 October 2025

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[0:00] Please turn up Ruth chapter 4, page 224, the Black Bibles. I've been thinking for a while about! I'm quite fascinated by happiness as it happens. What actually is it? Where is it really to be found?

Is happiness actually real? Comes and it goes. Is it actually a real thing? Can I actually keep hold of it? Biblically speaking, is being happy a goal that I should set myself, or does it actually come from the pursuit of something else that's more biblical and so I should pursue that thing like sacrifice or service, and then happiness will come my way? We all want to be happy. What do you think? What do you think about that? Maybe you don't care. Maybe it's just me. One of the eccentricities, many eccentricities that I have, thinking about happiness. Why would you be fascinated by that? Number of years ago, I read a review of psychological research on happiness, and they said this, quote, the data showed that chasing happiness can make people unhappy. And what really struck me was this, the suicide rate has been rising around the world. Even though life is getting objectively better by nearly every conceivable standard, more people feel hopeless, depressed, and alone. There's an emptiness gnawing away at people, and you don't have to be clinically depressed to feel it, end quote.

Our push for happiness. It is an agenda that the world has laid out before us that we should be happy and we should pursue these particular pathways to get it. That pursuit of happiness is making us unhappy. We have never had, in the West, more of the things that we've been told will deliver happiness.

We are richer. We are healthier. We are more connected. Travel is easier. But while you might not feel hopeless, you might not say that that's as far as you would go this morning, or depressed, or alone, happiness still seems to slip through our fingers.

[2:10] That was certainly the experience of Naomi and Ruth in this story. If you've been with us from chapter one, you'll know that the pursuit of happiness away from God was what left them empty in chapter one.

They left God behind. In Bethlehem, they went to Moab. They shouldn't have done that. It was a sinful and rebellious decision, but they did it because they wanted to be happy, and they didn't believe that they'd be happy where they were. Then there's the possibility of happiness through this guy called Boaz we met in chapter two. And last time, despite Naomi's plan in chapter three, the marriage proposal in the night that we saw, the real happiness of marriage and a home and a descendant to carry on the family name has not materialized. At the end of the chapter we left last week, we were left in limbo. The plan had not yet come to pass. There'd been lots of positive sounds. There'd been lots of promises made, but the happiness still hadn't materialized. This morning we see that that is going to change, but not because they find happiness, but because they find something much deeper.

They find redemption. Redemption. You see, we know that we can't create happiness, certainly not in a lasting way ourselves. We make mistakes. We say and do stupid things. We hurt ourselves and we hurt others, and all those things rob us of happiness. Our health doesn't go to plan. Our plans don't go to plan, and so happiness eludes us. But redemption goes underneath all of that. Redemption goes deeper.

It changes us from the inside. If we want to be happy, we need the redemption that is described here in Ruth chapter four. As I said, we were left in suspense last week. Ruth asked Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer. She proposed marriage, but Boaz pointed out that there was someone who was legally closer who should have this first refusal in the matter, and he promised to sort that out. So, 4 verse 1, Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So, Boaz said, turn aside, friend. Sit down here. And he turned

aside and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and he said, sit down here. So, they sat down. The gate was where business was transacted. A quorum of elders were gathered. These were the officials who would ratify these sort of transactions, especially family matters, and Boaz calls them together. Verse 3, then he said to the redeemer, Naomi, who has 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 of it and say, buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if not, tell me that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.

[ 5 : 31 ] So, Boaz, in sorting out this issue that was left hanging at the end of chapter 3, Naomi starts with, finds the redeemer, the closer redeemer, and starts this process with Naomi's land. Now, there's been no mention of the land up to this point in the story. Naomi, or Elimelech, her husband, her late husband, would have received this land. They would have received it on their return from Egypt, and it would have been then forfeited when they went to Moab. But the law stated that a kinsman redeemer could buy the land back, and the new owner couldn't refuse.

That's where Boaz starts in this process. He goes to the redeemer, and he says, do you want to buy the land? You'll get a bit of land here. What's he doing? We want Boaz to marry Ruth. Boaz wants to marry Ruth. We want it to happen. But Boaz is here making the deal attractive to this other kinsman redeemer.

And then it happens. End of verse 4. What does he say? I will redeem it. The whole thing has just gone south. The whole plan has just fallen apart before our eyes. This is like the bad ending of a film. It's like the ending when people in the cinema, sometimes you get it in a film that ends so badly, the plan doesn't go as we had all wanted it, and there's an audible sigh.

People go, oh, no. But wait a second. We need to keep reading. Verse 5, Boaz keeps talking. 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.

You say you're going to redeem it. Okay, great. You don't just get the land. You have to take on the widow, Ruth, as well, who's a Moabite. And you must perpetuate the name of the dead with his property, which means you need to give this woman a son, and that son will keep the land. Those are the terms of the leveret law. So, he's just making it really clear. You said you're going to redeem it.

[ 7 : 49 ] The cost to redeem would be this man's, but the land never actually would. Putting it bluntly, all the cost would be his, and all the benefits would remain with Ruth and her family line.

So, just as Boaz planned, verse 6, ah, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance.

Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it. Yes, genius. He knew what he was doing all along, and it's off with the sandal, we're told. It's a version of signing paperwork.

You can, I think it's like saying, you can walk in my shoes in this matter. They exchange sandals, and Boaz stands to make it official. Verse 9, you are witnesses this day that I have bought the land from the hand of Naomi, all that belong to Elimelech, and all that belong to Kilion and to 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, and the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day. And then all who have gathered agree. And there's a prayer for blessing. Verse 11, may the Lord make the woman, literally now the wife, be richly blessed like Rachel and Leah. And verse 12, like the house, the family of Perez. Celebration, celebration, blessing, yet again in this story with all of its twists and turns, all of the tension that we're holding our breath, wondering how it's going to be resolved, yet again it's been resolved. The twists have been straightened out.

[ 9 : 32 ] Ruth, Naomi, the land, Boaz has stepped in to redeem. There are three aspects of this redemption that I want us to see. The first is this. This is where we bring this ancient story forward to ourselves. The first thing we need to see is this redemption is accomplished alone.

It's a detail we might have missed, but do you remember Boaz's instructions to Ruth on the threshing floor back in chapter 3, verses 12 and 13? She proposes, he says, oh, but there's a closer redeemer than him. He then says this, remain tonight and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him do it. But if he's not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning. He promises to redeem her, but she must remain. She must lie down until

morning. And when we meet Boaz at the town gate, there is no sign of Ruth. He goes alone. Naomi also drew attention to this in chapter 3, verse 18. Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. She tells Ruth to rest while Boaz settles the redemption. Boaz goes out to accomplish this redemption without any input from Ruth. He goes alone.

This is actually the heart of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. You remember in the gospels, Jesus promised that he will accomplish the redemption of his people. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, Mark 9, 31, and they will kill him. And when he's killed, after three days, he will rise.

He repeats that promise in Mark 10, 33, but why will he do it? Why is this his mission? Mark 10, 45, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom, as a redemption for many. Jesus says, I am your Redeemer. I will redeem you from Satan, sin, and death itself. I will purchase you out of the grip of your sin with my death and blood.

That is the promise that Jesus makes. And then in the garden of Gethsemane, as he stares into the cup of God's wrath that he must drink in order to pay the redemption price, as he stares in the face every sin that you and I have ever committed, and he balks, overwhelmed with sorrow. He asks his disciples, do you remember, to watch and pray, but they can't do it.

[12:17] Instead, what do they do? They fall asleep. There is a sense in which they get to rest while Jesus goes alone outside the city gate to win their redemption.

In Boaz, we see how redemption is accomplished for us all. Christ is the one who acts to rescue you. You do nothing. You can do nothing. We are completely helpless. God does it all.

That is the essence of grace. That is the essence of biblical Christianity, and it is the opposite of what many people think being a Christian is all about. People I talk to just assume that Christianity is about people getting their moral game together so that God will accept them.

Christians are religious people who do certain religious things in order that God will be happy with them and will accept them. No. No, no, no. None of us could clean ourselves up enough to satisfy a perfectly holy God. No one can fix themselves on the inside. That's the problem. None of us can get deep enough to address the problems of our heart, our desires, our motives. Those are the things at root that make us unacceptable to God, and we can't fix those ourselves however hard we try. However much you grit your teeth, however hard you try to be a good person, you know in your heart of hearts that you can't do it. We can't fix ourselves, and that is precisely why we need redemption.

[13:58] We contribute nothing. Jesus pays it all. That is actually the second point that this story makes about redemption. It is accomplished alone, quite apart from the one who is redeemed. But why do you think our author gives us all the details about the men at the town gate? Do you think that's interesting? Why didn't he just say the nearer kinsman redeemer chose not to redeem, and Boaz took his responsibility?

That's a lot quicker than those 12 verses. The nearer kinsman redeemer decided it wasn't for him, and he allowed Boaz to take his place. We're given the details of what this redemption will entail to show us, secondly, that this redemption is costly. It is costly. Redemption always requires a cost to be met. The very nature of what is going on is that a price is paid in order to purchase that person out of their slavery, out of their situation, out of their deficit. And the details in this story are here highlighted to show the extent to which Boaz was prepared to go. He has continued to show kindness. When he appeared on the scene at the beginning of chapter 2, we knew that he was going to be the hero. We knew that the story was going to center around what he was going to do. And with every kind of mention of his name, his virtue, his integrity, his greatness is held up. And he has continued to show kindness here. He has fulfilled the law. He has gone beyond the leverant requirements. We saw that with the way that he was so generous with the gleaning laws.

And he has done this all at great cost to himself. Redeeming Ruth will endanger his estate. As I said, all of the cost will be his, and all of the blessing will be Ruth's. And we'll see next week, Lord willing, Naomi's as well. But this is what he will do in order to take this woman from hopeless emptiness, that's where she was when we met her at the beginning of the story, to fullness.

And again, Boaz is giving us a glimpse here, a tiny glimpse of the cost of our redemption in Christ. In going to the cross to redeem us, the Lord Jesus has embraced not merely the cost of his estate, but the cost of his life. Peter tells us, you were ransomed, you were redeemed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold. Silver or gold, if

you have enough of that, they're very valuable, very precious, but not with those things which are perishable, but with the precious blood of Christ. Something of infinitely higher value than anything material that we could ever have. And because of this sacrifice, the Apostle Paul can say, Colossians 2, in Christ you have been filled. Like Naomi and Ruth, gone from emptiness to being full, in Christ you have been filled. We are purchased out of our slavery to sin. We are forgiven. We are reconciled to God and made alive with Christ. All of the cost was his, and all of the blessing flows down to us. It is an amazing thing. When it comes to gifts, they say it's the thought that counts.

[ 17 : 46 ] It's the thought that counts. And there's something in that, isn't there? When somebody buys you, when my wife buys me something, the fact that she was thinking of me when I wasn't there, that in itself is a gift. That's a nice thing. The person was thinking of you, and therefore there is something of that that is in itself a gift. And you say, thank you, that's very nice. But when you receive a gift that obviously costs the giver a lot, and whether that's time or money or their effort or whatever it might be, you do feel a much deeper sense of gratitude.

The Lord Jesus has redeemed you by paying the greatest cost that anyone could pay. And it's not just that He gives His life in the way that you or I could give our lives.

It would be a huge kindness for us to step in the way of harm in order to save someone else and for our lives to be given up. But it is the infinite life of the infinite Son of God. It is a life like no other.

The Lord Jesus, when He gives His life, He gives that which is of infinite value.

And if we take it a stage further, when the gift that is given is so generous that it changes your life, you feel completely different about the person who gave it.

I know somebody who needed a kidney transplant, and their father was a suitable match for them, and their father gave them one of his kidneys. And the transplant was successful, and he has gone on to live a very full life and hasn't needed any of the ongoing things. It worked perfectly, you could say.

[ 19 : 42 ] And when He speaks about His father, there is all of the respect and love that you would expect in a normal, healthy relationship with someone's father. But there is another level to his appreciation and the depth of his love because of what his father did for him. He gave him a gift that literally changed his life.

Ruth was a destitute outsider to the things of God. Now in Boaz, she has protection, provision, and abundance, and the prospect of a family. He has changed her life.

But those things, wonderful as they are, they don't even get close to how much more we have received in our redemption. We have been redeemed from the futility and the hopelessness of sin. There is no emptiness like the human heart in the grip of sin. And we have been rescued from that, and we have been redeemed to fullness for eternity in Christ.

That gift isn't something that just changes our earthly lives like a kidney, or a load of money, or anything else that might change your life. It literally transforms our eternity.

[ 21 : 09 ] A gift that we are given that is of infinite value that changes everything, not just in the present, but for all eternity. Oh! And doesn't that then take us back to that elusive happiness that we talked about at the beginning?

If you know that one day your struggles in life are going to end, they don't have the grip on you that they otherwise would. So you don't worry as much, and you can enjoy the things that you have and not fret about what you don't have. If you know that because in Christ your life has purpose and significance, you're united to the king of glory. You don't need to pursue the kind of happiness that the world tells us that we absolutely must have. Whatever we have, we enjoy in this life, and we know that it will always pass. We know that for the Christian, whatever we have, there is always better to come. That changes everything and allows us to find happiness in the goodness of even just ordinary things. If you think you'll only be happy if you have the best of something, you just can't enjoy the not best thing.

But if you know that the very best is still to come, you can enjoy whatever you have now. If we don't make happiness our chief goal in life, but we make Christ our chief goal, we actually free ourselves to be happy, to be truly happy. So this redemption, you see, is accomplished alone, and it is accomplished at great cost. But there is one more tension in the story. Having said that the tension has been resolved, there is one more that remains here that must be resolved. You see, remember that Ruth was married to Melon for maybe as much as 10 years. We were told in chapter 1 that they lived in Moab for 10 years. But there's no mention of any children. They were married for that length

of time, but they had no children. And one of the vital parts of Naomi's plan in this whole thing is that Ruth has a child to carry on the family name, but so far she has not been able to conceive. So the tension now is, well, will this happen? It's all very well, Boaz going out to redeem her, but is she going to be able to conceive? Is the story now going to end on another dark note? Well, look at verse 11.

The elders pray, May the Lord make the woman, make this wife who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah. They pray for Ruth to be as fertile and instrumental in the life of the nation as Rachel and Leah.

Now, Rachel and Leah, despite alternating between barrenness and fruitfulness, they mothered the twelve tribes of Israel. And then they pray for Boaz himself. Verse 12, May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman. They pray for this to be a fruitful union. We saw last week the parallels with that relationship, Judah and Tamar, Genesis 38. We saw how Boaz and Ruth pursued the continuation of the family line legitimately and how Boaz acted with the integrity that Judah lacked to perpetuate a family. Well, is it going to work? Is the prayer going to be answered? Verse 13, yes, it is.

[ 24 : 42 ] So Boaz took Ruth, she became his wife, and he went into her and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son, and she bore a son. So here's the third thing that we see about redemption.

The redemption is fruitful. It is fruitful. Notice how the wording emphasizes that it's not Boaz, but it's the Lord who enables her to conceive. Like all the matriarchs in the book of Genesis who are barren until the Lord intervenes, so it is with Ruth. The Lord is acting through Boaz as he acted through Abraham, and he does for Ruth what he did for Sarah. The Lord is keeping his promise, and he is extending the growth of his kingdom. There are two things to say. I know that the issue of childlessness is unbelievably painful for those who experienced it. We've walked this road with couples over the years, dear friends, who have not been able to conceive. In some cases, I've taken the funerals of longed for children who haven't made it out of the womb. I'm not unaware of the layers of pain that come with this issue. None of us, none of us know why the Lord gives this painful providence.

But it is important that we see that he would have been no less kind, no less faithful, no less good if he had not opened Ruth's womb. Now, we can see from our perspective why he didn't give her children to a disobedient husband in Moab. It's clear, isn't it? He had a better plan in mind. He had chosen that she would be the one who would bear a son to a faithful Israelite that would be in the Messianic line. God doesn't promise us any of this. He doesn't promise any of us anything in this life.

But he always works his mysterious providence for good, and we can trust him, even through tears. Keep trusting him. It doesn't mean that he doesn't love you.

We don't know what it does mean, but it doesn't mean that he doesn't love you. The second thing to say is this. This promise of fruitfulness again points us forward to the Lord Jesus. When Jesus tells us his life is a ransom for many, he really means many. He means the nations who have been given to him by his father, Sam 2. He means the world that the father gave him for, John 3 16. He means the growth of the kingdom from the size of a mustard seed. It began with 11 on the mountain at the end of Matthew's gospel to the largest tree that the birds of the air make their home in. There are billions of men and women, boys and girls, who name the name of Christ all over the world today. His redemption is a fruitful redemption, and his redemption is bearing fruit as you raise your children to love and serve him. It is bearing fruit every time you share the gospel with someone who puts their faith in Jesus. It is bearing fruit when people come in the door here because they just want to know more about Jesus. He is redeeming his bride. He is building his church.

[ 28 : 21 ] The gates of hell won't prevail. Be confident that the redemption that you are a part of is a redemption that is one day going to cover the whole of the world. That makes me happy, and it should make you happy too.

Let's pray.