

Ruth 4:13-22

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[0 : 0 0] If you turn up again, Ruth chapter 4, and we'll bring things in to close now this morning.! A year or so before he died, Johnny Cash recorded a song called Hurt, and it was a slow and somber walk through some of his regrets and hurts and the impact of loss on his life. I hurt myself today to see if I still feel. I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real. What have I become? The song asks my sweetest friend, everyone I know goes away in the end. You could have it all, my empire of dirt.

I will let you down. I will make you hurt. Now, I thought we could put it as poetically as he does, but who among us can't identify with some of these feelings? Life is complicated, and it's painful. It's often confusing, and even our successes, when they come our way, don't really satisfy us. They often leave us feeling empty.

When we met her at the start of the story, Naomi was singing this kind of song. She was standing in the wreckage of her life, overwhelmed with grief and anger towards the loss of her family and her future. But here we are at the end of the story, and the tune has changed completely. Now, Naomi isn't herself singing. She doesn't even speak in these verses. She's overwhelmed, but she's overwhelmed in a good way. This time, she's overwhelmed with joy. You see, Boaz, who stepped up, we saw last time, to redeem Ruth, verse 13, has also accomplished redemption for Naomi. Through Boaz, Naomi, as well as Ruth, has received the hesed, the loving kindness of God, such that the son that is born to Boaz and Ruth, well, through him she also has a Redeemer. Look at verse 14,

Then the woman said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a Redeemer. Even though this boy is Ruth's son, the woman who gathered can say, verse 17, a son has been born to Naomi. Because this boy is a descendant through Ruth of Malon, Naomi's son, he will be her Redeemer as well. And where last week we saw the nature of this redemption, this morning we see what this redemption achieves, both for Naomi, but also via these generations that were given at the end of the book for the whole world. This ancient story this morning is a story that speaks to your life and mine. It speaks to your hurts and your brokenness and your trials and your troubles and mine. And it speaks to us about transformation, because that actually is what redemption does. Redemption meets us in our misery. It meets us in our emptiness, and even worse, in our sense of deathly dread that we sometimes feel, and it transforms us. That's what we see here.

So let's walk through these verses. We see that it is a transformation. This redemption is a transformation that works in three ways. First of all, it takes us from death to life. Number one, from death to life. Verse 14, blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a Redeemer, and may His name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and 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.

[4 : 1 7] The Lord has not left Naomi without a Redeemer, and He shall be to you a restorer of life. In Moab, Naomi was dead. Spiritually, she had spurned the God of life, but physically, without her husband and her sons, her life was literally slipping away. Without their protection, without their provision, she would have died. And now this has changed. Through the provision of this boy, she has been redeemed out of that state. God has reached into her life through His servant.

Obed means servant. It's probably a version of Obadiah, which means servant of the Lord, and He will provide what she needs. He has taken her from death to life. The second transformation is a transformation from emptiness to fullness, from empty to full. You remember that key moment when Naomi returned from Moab, she told the women who greeted her that she was returning empty. Chapter 1, verse 21.

This was true. She was coming back empty, but potentially these same women now praise God that her emptiness has been filled. How has it happened? Well, we could say it started with the filling of Ruth's womb. In verse 13, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. But the women draw attention to Ruth herself as part of the way that God has filled Naomi's life. Can you see verse 15? Your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to Him. It's really interesting. This is the only instance in the book where the verb to love is used. Now, it's a surprise because we would expect that language. We've read the story. We've walked through it. We would expect that language to describe Boaz and Ruth's relationship, but it doesn't. [6:13] What we're supposed to see here is that the supreme example of love in the book is from this young Moabite widow towards her mother-in-law. And her love, we're told, makes her better to Naomi than seven sons. All the years of distance between us in this context, we don't really see how shocking that statement is. In a culture where sons were cherished and highly regarded, this is a remarkable thing to say. Seven sons would have been the epitome of the Old Testament ideal, a way of describing the perfect number of offspring. And these women tell Naomi that having Ruth in her life is even better than that.

Naomi came back from Moab without her husband and her sons, but she returned with Ruth, who is better than them all. In this story, one woman is better than seven men. Ruth has filled Naomi's life. But this is about more than her faithfulness. It's about more than her kindness. It's about more than her loyalty. It is ultimately because Ruth has filled, verse 16, Naomi's lap. Do you see the little one? Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi. The language here parallels the way Naomi's sons, Malon and Killian, were described in chapter 1. And so, just as Ruth has brought out from her apron in chapters 2 and 3, food and grain and provision for Naomi's empty stomach, here she brings out of her womb a little boy to fill the emptiness in her heart and in her life. And this boy, he won't just look after Naomi in her old age. He will continue the family line of Elimelech and Bethlehem.

There can be nothing more painful than a parent experiencing the death of their child. And there is little to rival the joy of a baby being born. This story of Ruth starts with the former, and it ends with the latter. It is a story of transformation. And what that means is, not just death to life, not just empty to full, but this Redeemer also takes us, thirdly, from misery to hope. That's the journey that this book has taken us on. The only people to speak in these verses at the end of the book are the women who bless the Lord and direct their comments towards Naomi. And the point of the women's blessing, see, they don't praise Boaz or Ruth.

[9:07] They praise God, but they direct that praise towards Naomi. And they do that because, in the book, this is to reverse Naomi's speech to those, maybe those same women back in chapter 1.

Do you remember? Don't call me... She comes back, is this Naomi? Is this pleasant? She says, don't call me pleasant. Call me bitter, because the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. He has brought calamity upon me. And here we are. These women are saying, all of that has been reversed. All the calamity has been transformed. Every one of the losses has now been made up for.

She had nothing. Now she has protection. She has provision, and she has heritage again. God has restored her. But we read on to the end of the book. We see it's not just her.

This redemption goes further. Verse 18, Now these are the generations of Perez. Perez fathered Hezron. Hezron fathered Ram. Ram fathered Aminadab. Aminadab fathered Nashon. Nashon fathered Salmon. Salmon fathered Boaz. Boaz fathered Obed.

[10:18] Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David. Don't you think that it's odd at the end of a love story, the climax of the love story, is a list of names? It feels like the happy ending that we were all hoping for has been blunted because a history nerd has come in and said, I'm sorry, these are some of the details we need to include here. Why do we need the family tree? What on earth is the import of that?

Well, the point is the two are related, and it's not strange at all. This list of names is the reason why Ruth is better than seven sons. Perez de Boaz represents the history of God's people between his great promises to have a people for himself who would live in his land under his blessing, through the exodus, through the return to the land, and now the rebellion in the time of the judges.

But then there's this boy, Obed, and then his father, Jesse, and his grandfather, King David. The one in Naomi's lap is the one who will bring peace and prosperity to God's people.

In the days when the judges ruled and there is no king in the land, here is the hope of God's king coming again to establish his rule. And don't miss the fact that there are ten generations listed here. This takes us back to Genesis in the section that we're studying here in the evenings.

Genesis 5 and Genesis 11 have ten generation lists. The genealogy in Genesis 5 ends with Noah. The one in chapter 11 ends with Abraham. So this genealogy puts David in the same redemptive historical role as Noah and Abraham. What he's saying is he is a new man. He is a new Adam. He is a new leader of God's people, a new head of God's people for a new epoch in the life of God's people. In the days when the judges ruled, that is how we start the book and we end the book with a king. God is bringing his king, his redeemer, into the life of God's people. And the mention of Obed's grandfather doesn't just point us back. He pushes us where we are this morning forward. We're not just looking back to King David.

[12 : 35] We're looking forward. Through this little boy in Naomi's lap, she has been grafted, Luke chapter 3 tells us, into the line and the ancestry of David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the redeemer of the world. These names aren't just the work of a history nerd. They take us to the climax of the whole narrative. Here it is, through the kindness of God, seen in the kindness shown by the characters in this story. God has come to this one family in the midst of the chaos of rebellion and suffering, and through them, he brings his redeemer. But what we need to see, what we need to see this morning is that he brings his redeemer who brings us a redemption that takes us from death to life, first of all.

This isn't just an ancient story. This is for us. You see, in our sin, we are dead, not physically, but spiritually. And physical death exists in the world to teach us that lesson. Every death that we come across in this life is like a klaxon going off to waken us up to our spiritual state, to our need for redemption and for reconciliation with God. Redemption that is being purchased out of slavery for freedom.

That is what we need, and that is what brings us life. We need to be purchased out of our slavery to sin and death and given new life, and that is what we have in the Lord Jesus. Our culture loves to talk about and extol the virtues of freedom. For some in our culture, this means throwing off the shackles of tradition and essentially the Christian influence that shaped the Western world and making the government approve of my choices. That's what freedom is. I want to be able to choose whatever I like, and you need to say that that is okay. If I want to kill my unborn child, if I want to reject the sex that I was born with, if I want to marry whoever I like, I should be free to do that. And it is my right, and that is my freedom. For others, it means getting any influence over me out of my life, getting the government out of my business. I can associate with whoever I want. I can think and say whatever I want. Now, those two versions of freedom, one is obviously a lot more virtuous than the other, but here's the thing. Apart from Christ, neither represent true freedom. Apart from Christ, our commitment to those things will itself only serve to enslave us further.

If we're prepared to be honest with ourselves, and for lots of us that's the real issue, we're not prepared to be honest with ourselves, but if we're prepared to look ourselves in the mirror and recognize the way that our hearts work within us, the way that our desires control us, and the way that when those desires aren't for God, how they actually then begin to destroy us.

If we're prepared to admit that, well, then we'll be able to admit that we really aren't free. Whatever we're allowed to do by other people, we're not free. We're still slaves to our desires.

[15 : 58] That's the only alternative. If you're not free, you're a slave. And the only thing a slave can hope for is that someone will come and release them. Someone will come and redeem them out of their slavery. Slaves can't do that by themselves. They need someone to do it on their behalf. They need a redeemer. And Jesus is our redeemer. He is our ultimate kinsman redeemer, who, like Boaz, lived in obedience to God's law, bore the cost of our failure to keep that law through his death in our place in order to purchase us out of sin, in order to purchase us out of those twisted desires that we hate about ourselves when we're prepared to be honest, and to deliver us completely from our past.

Whatever our past includes, when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus, and I mean whatever it includes, when we put our faith in the Lord Jesus, He redeems us from it all. So, we're not just redeemed from the kind of poverty and sadness that Naomi and Ruth are involved in here, or that is their lot, but we are redeemed from the spiritual bankruptcy and slavery and death in which our sin holds us captive. And we're made alive in Christ. Jesus gives us life that is truly life. And when the Son sets you free, you're free indeed.

So, we're redeemed from death to life. But redemption means that we're also taken from emptiness to fullness. This is one of the ways that Jesus describes the life that He has come to bring.

In contrast, Jesus says to the visions of life that others hold out and take from us, the other visions of life, if you're not committed to the Lord Jesus, whatever it is that you're committed to, that life will always take from you, whether it is a religion or a cultural promise or whatever it is. In contrast to that, Jesus says, I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. That is, have it in all its fullness. The Apostle Peter we heard last week says that we have been ransomed, we've been redeemed from the futile, that is the empty ways, the philosophies of this world.

And then the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 2.10 that we have been filled, filled in Christ who is the head of all rule and authority. We've been taken from emptiness to fullness. Now, in light of the book of Ruth and the way that story unfolds, we need to be clear that this fullness is not necessarily getting what we want in this life. However good those things we long for may be, in the context of this story, it's important to see that for us, fullness doesn't mean that He is promising us husbands or children or provision or an end to sadness or grief in this life.

[19 : 05] The book of Psalms is given to the church, prayers and songs. And when we read the book of Psalms, we realize that we are to sing prayers and songs that sound a lot more like hurt than they do, oh happy day. The Christian pilgrimage, our experience in the present is not necessarily one of clicking your heels and dancing down the road. So what does it mean that in Christ we are full? It means this, God the Father loves you, God the Son died for you, God the Spirit lives in you, He's working all things together for your good and you're on your way to glory. Guaranteed. That's what it means. The God of heaven and earth has set His love on you. The way that that is expressed is that He sent His Son to die and rise for your sins such that your guilt and sin are taken away.

He sent His Spirit to fill your life with power. The ability to say no to sin. That's slavery. We were talking about those twisted desires that characterize our hearts apart from Christ.

He gives us the ability to say no to those desires, to resist them, to be genuinely free. And He is sovereignly ordering all your steps, which means that you can trust Him through the good times and the bad. And you can do that because you're looking forward to a sure and certain hope of resurrection joy. That is a fullness that you can't buy. That is a fullness that you can't get anywhere else. But it is yours if you're in Christ. Too often we look around us and we think that if we had that shiny new thing or that impressive job or those well-behaved children or that comfortable house or whatever it might be, then we would be full. Then life would be brilliant. No, we wouldn't.

Because there's always something shinier and better that would always turn our heads. Fullness that satisfies is only found in Christ. And you, if you're trusting Christ, possess that now.

So, I may encourage you, stop having your head turned by those other false promises of fullness. They cannot fill you. They cannot satisfy. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

[21 : 38] Look full in His wonderful face. Because that's when the things of this earth that don't fill you will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory, His grace, and the fullness that only He can bring.

One last thing to say about fullness. When Paul uses the language in the book of Ephesians, he refers to the church as Christ's body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way, Ephesians 1.23. So, I want to underline that if you want to experience the fullness of Christ, He is present when the church gathers like this. And it is through our relationships with one another, in the life of the church, in the body of Christ, that we are filled, Ephesians 3.14, to the measure of all the fullness of God. Belonging to the church is part of that journey from emptiness to fullness.

Unsurprisingly, this mirrors the experience of Naomi and Ruth.

Away from God and His people, that was where they were empty. Back among the people of God, they found fullness. So, Christ brings us from death to life. That's what redemption means.

He brings us from emptiness to fullness. And while that inevitably then transforms us, thirdly, from misery to hope. We're not just redeemed from shame and bitterness and the hopelessness of losing our family line like Naomi, but from the shame of sin, the stain of every bad thing that we have ever done. The bitterness of a world that always lets us down and the hopelessness of a life without God. That is what we're redeemed from in the Lord Jesus. And the hope of a Redeemer King in the future that ends this book has been realized in the first, first of all, in King David and then in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're looking back on all of that. And so, we can have an even more certain hope about His active presence with us and His coming again. Misery to hope. This means, firstly, a hope

for salvation. If you're singing Johnny Cash's song, Christ offers you a redemption that will transform your life as powerfully as it transformed Naomi's. Our God is in the business of turning lives around. So, turn to Him. If you haven't done this, turn to Him in repentance for your sin, and those sins will be forgiven. Your conscience will be cleansed. Your life will be changed forever, and your future will be shot through with hope. You will be taken from emptiness to fullness, from death to life. Do it today.

Do it in your seat. Lord Jesus, I am sorry for having lived my way in your life. Forgive me, renew me, redeem me, and make me yours. Hope for salvation. This also means there's hope for those of us who are stuck.

[24 : 48] If you belong to Jesus Christ, but you feel stuck in some way, by which I mean stuck in a sin that is ensnaring you, stuck in a rut, a joylessness that you can't seem to throw off, remember that you have a Redeemer. You have a Redeemer who, through the cross, shoved a stake through your sin and has given you His Holy Spirit to enable you to stand in the face of every temptation.

He has given you His Holy Spirit, who is His power in you to leave your sin behind, to look at Christ and to give you the joy of knowing what it means to be truly free in Him.

Here's another song, My Hands Were Made Strong by the Hand of the Almighty. We forward in this generation triumphantly. Won't you help me sing these songs of freedom?

The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. Hope for salvation. Hope for the stuck. Hope for the sufferer. A day is coming when every loss that you have experienced will be reversed. Every calamity will be a memory. Your trials, whatever they are, loneliness, marriage, children, sickness, emotional turmoil, they are only for a time and they will pass. Because your Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, is making all things new. Knowing this doesn't take the pain away in the moment, but it does put it into perspective. Let me encourage you to keep bringing those trials to Jesus and keep trusting Him to bring you to the end of the race.

When you read the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, each one of them emphasizes slightly different things. They speak of the one Gospel of the Lord Jesus in slightly different ways. Well, here is the Gospel according to Ruth. In Christ your Redeemer, you are brought from death to life, from emptiness to fullness, from misery to hope. Let's pray.