

RUTH 4:1-15

God's Providential Timing

Every culture has customs that are strange to other nations. Even in America we have our strange traditions. Every year, the President of the United States pardons a turkey before Thanksgiving. Likewise, we try to predict the length of winter using a groundhog. America still uses the imperial system while the rest of the world uses the metric system.

So too, the opening scenes of chapter 4 in Ruth are strange to our ears, yet they reflect an ancient society's legal and cultural traditions. The main point is not *how* Naomi and Ruth are redeemed, but that they *are* redeemed by Boaz.

In chapter 3, Boaz agrees to redeem the widows. This is a legal process that would liberate (redeem) Naomi and Ruth from their debts and provide for them. There is, however, a closer kinsman-redeemer to Naomi than Boaz. Thus, for Boaz to be the kinsman-redeemer, he had to follow a legal process.

The matter up for sale is land. Naomi is offering to sell her land, but doing so, the buyer (initially the closest kinsman-redeemer) would have to provide for the two widows. Even more, any son born because of the union would inherit the land, not the son of the kinsman-redeemer. When he discovers this, he backs away allowing Boaz to assume the property and the two women that come with it.

The two men agree that Boaz becomes the kinsman-redeemer. It was "signed" by a strange custom involving sandals that is odd to the modern ear. Regardless, Boaz announces, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that 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" (Ruth 4:9-10). The elders then announce a blessing upon Boaz, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like

Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and 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” (Ruth 4:11-12).

As redeemer, the writer wants the reader to see Boaz as a type of Christ. Although there are two men in the story, there is only one true redeemer. The unnamed man was willing to invest in the land for himself but would not invest in two widows. Investing in them would have been too costly. But for Boaz, the cost was more than worth it. He gained little in wealth, but an abundance in love.

Boaz does everything. Ruth merely receives the gift of the redeemer. He makes the financial investment. He enters the legal realm. He redeems the widows. So too, gospel redemption is the exclusive work of Christ by which our redemption is secured upon our reception of it.

The story concludes with Boaz and Ruth’s wedding and the birth of their firstborn son. In a single verse (vs. 13), everything that happened in chapter 1 is undone. Marriage after widowhood. Redemption following poverty. Love despite being a foreigner. Children after being barren.

Neither Ruth nor Boaz are mentioned in the rest of the text outside of the concluding genealogy. Strangely, Naomi returns as the focus. She recognizes that this child is more than a child. He is evidence of God’s faithfulness even through suffering. “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” (Ruth 4:15).

Here, Naomi finally learns that amid her pain, her self-absorption blinded her to Ruth’s love and God’s grace. At that moment, Ruth was more valuable than the two sons she lost, and God proved more faithful than her husband who moved his family.

Hindsight is always 20/20. Naomi was a woman with a fickle faith. No doubt if she could perceive the birth of her grandchild, she would have been more patient and careful with her words and emotions. We are always in the wrong when we conclude God is our enemy. This is why faith and patience are an inseparable pair.

It is here where God’s providence officially kisses God’s goodness. The narrative of Ruth has concluded, but God is not finished yet. This couple will launch the ultimate redemption of Israel. Ruth had sought redemption. God would bring a Redeemer.