

The Price and Promise of Redemption

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, we all love a heartwarming redemption story, don't we? Our TVs have been flooded by them for weeks.

Perhaps you've had a chance to watch one or two. There are the old classics, of course. A Christmas Carol, a man twisted by self-love is visited by three ghosts and learns in the end to love others again.

Or there are modern classics. The Grinch, a horrible green creature, hates everyone and then is shown love and kindness.

And what happened then? Well, in Whoville, they say the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day. Or my favorite, Nativity, a schoolteacher who inexplicably hates children is shown tough love by a crazy assistant and learns to love life again.

It could go on and on. I'm sure you can think of others. But what is it about these stories that fascinates us? Why do we love redemption stories?

[1 : 1 2] Well, there's something in us, isn't there, that loves to see people redeemed by kindness. Those stories tug on something deep in each of our hearts, whoever we are, because they are telling and retelling in shadows and shades.

It's the story that is at the beating heart of life, the universe and everything. The Bible is God's great story.

And at its heart, we find it is a redemption story. And this evening, we're coming to the climax of a book in the Old Testament that captures that theme of redemption in a nutshell.

It's been a few weeks since we parked the book of Ruth. But perhaps if you were here in the middle of December, I wonder if you can remember where we left Ruth and Naomi.

At the end of chapter one, way back, we left these women hungry, hungry. Naomi and her family had gone, remember, from the promised land to a foreign land because of a famine.

[2 : 1 6] But in Moab, they find not life, but death. And so Naomi, now without her husband and her two sons, but with two daughters-in-law, turns back to God's place.

Along the way, one daughter loses heart, turns back. But the other daughter, Ruth, puts her faith in God and carries on. And so arriving back in the land, then, these women are hungry, not only for food, but hungry for the kind of God that God promises to be to those who trust him.

And then at the end of chapter two, we left Ruth and Naomi hoping, hoping, remember, faithful Ruth trusted God to be as good as his word and found him, in fact, to be better than his word.

She went gleaning in a field that happened to belong to Boaz, who happened to be their rich relative, who happened also to be a possible redeemer for their family, who happened also to be extraordinarily kind.

And Boaz's kindness and generosity overflowed, didn't it, upon Ruth and Naomi and left them hoping in this would-be redeemer. And so by the end of chapter three, where we left off, we found Naomi and Ruth waiting.

[3 : 4 7] Waiting. Naomi sent Ruth, remember, to speak to Boaz in the dead of night, to ask him to spread his wings over her, to become her redeemer, to marry her.

And he said yes. The only catch we saw is that, in fact, there is another guardian redeemer closer to Ruth than Boaz.

And so Boaz goes straight away that morning to speak to him and work it out. And so now the whole thing stands, as it were, on a knife edge. Naomi says, wait.

Wait, wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. Hungry for God, hoping in a redeemer, waiting for redemption.

And this evening, chapter four, we come finally to see that redemption take place. And there are two things this evening which are designed to capture our hearts about this redemption.
[4 : 47] And the first we see is the price of that redemption, the price of redemption. And now Boaz left Ruth waiting, clearly for a bit less time than I've left you in suspense.

Because meanwhile, we read in verse one, that very morning, while Ruth is still telling Naomi the exciting details of the previous night, Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian redeemer he had mentioned came along.

Again, notice Boaz's integrity and devotion. He's not going to let the matter rest until he's seen his promise through to the end to become their redeemer.

And someone else is conspiring to see that happen too. Because as it happened, the other would-be redeemer also happens to be there too. You know, we can be surprised at that turn of events in the way that you might be surprised by a magic trick.

Because we know that what looks on the surface like chance, luck, magic, is in fact the skillful hand and the knowing plan of the one performing the trick.

[6 : 02] We're not told outright that God ordered this chance encounter, but that's what the writer wants us to see. In the same way that Ruth happened to go to Boaz's field and then, well, who would have guessed, but Boaz happened to arrive at that moment.

Well, so the writer now winks at us as he tells us that the two would-be redeemers happen to be in the right place at the right time to settle this big question.

See, the Lord himself is sovereignly knitting things together. Yes, for Naomi and Ruth, but as we will see, for all God's people yet to come.

Indeed, for us ourselves as well. And the way these two men meet is important. Notice that Boaz isn't in a dark back alley making threats.

No, he sits down at the town gate with this other unnamed redeemer and calls the elders to come over and sit down with them. And the result is something close, I suppose, to a family court.

[7 : 09] We've left behind the pastoral scene of the rolling barley fields, and we're now in a legal setting of a courtroom. The town gate was where conflicts were settled, where business was done, and all in the presence of witnesses, trustworthy witnesses, the elder statesmen, if you like, of the town.

And so the outcome of this conversation is legally binding. This is how far Boaz, the devoted man of great integrity, is willing to go to see Naomi and Ruth redeemed publicly, irreversibly, legally.

And so Boaz sets the deal on the table, doesn't he, before this would-be redeemer, verse 3. He said to the guardian redeemer, Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belongs to our relative Elimelech.

I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that ye buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so.

But if not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except ye, and I am next in line.

And to our shock horror, this other unnamed guy, verse 4, says, I will redeem it.

[8 : 33] What? Will this unknown, unnamed man sweep in at the last moment and steal Ruth from out of the arms of Boaz? Our hearts sink, don't they?

How can this be? But wait. Because Boaz, though pure in his dealings, still has one card left to play.

Then, said Boaz, verse 5, on the day that you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.

One last thing, he says. If you redeem the land, you also have to marry Ruth. Now, that might sound pretty harsh on Ruth, or as if perhaps she's being used as a bargaining chip.

But the thing that sours the deal for any would-be redeemer isn't so much marrying Ruth as the financial consequences of being a redeemer, redeeming the land for this family.

As Boaz says, the whole point of that marriage would be that the land would stay in the family.

Under God's law, the land wouldn't ultimately belong to the redeemer, but in name it would still belong to Ruth's deceased husband, Malon.

[9 : 53] Whoever married Ruth, their first child would legally be her first husband's child. He would carry the family name, inherit the family's wealth and property.

And so, purely economically, the deal has turned sour. Boaz is now asking this guy to buy a piece of land and marry a penniless foreign widow with no prospect of any financial return.

In short, redeeming this land now looks like a financial and relational black hole. See, Boaz is being, as Jesus would say, wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove.

He's beyond reproach and his dealings, but he's playing to win. He turns what seemed at first like a very good deal into a very bad deal. And so, verse 6, at this the guardian redeemer said, See, when he adds up the cost, the other redeemer folds.

He simply isn't willing to pay the price to redeem these women, even his very own flesh and blood. It would hurt my portfolio, he says. It would sink me.

[11:18] See, technically, technically, either of these men could have been a redeemer for Naomi and Ruth. But in the end, we see that only one of them truly is a redeemer.

In the same way that at the end of that other classic film, Matilda, perhaps you had a chance to see that over the festive period, when her horrible family pulls up in their car outside the house of her kind teacher.

We know that either the Wormwoods or Miss Honey could have been a family to this little girl. But our hearts sing for joy, don't they, when the Wormwoods drive away and leave Matilda in the arms of Miss Honey, because only one of them is truly, truly a family to her.

And so, in the same way, our hearts sing for joy when Boaz announces, verse 9, today you are witnesses, that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilian, and Malon.

I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Malon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his own town.

[12:33] Today you are witnesses. He's done it. They are redeemed. It's a triumphant moment in this book, but it's also breathtakingly poignant.

Because what makes Boaz a true redeemer is the fact that he was willing to pay the price where others were not.

See, the cost hasn't gone away. It's just that what one man isn't willing to pay, Boaz is willing to cover. I might lose out, said the other man, so be it, says Boaz.

It might hurt, he said, I'll do it anyway, said Boaz. I could lose everything. It would be worth it, says Boaz.

See, in the balance, all that he gains for this cost that he bears is Ruth herself. Lovely, isn't it? The land isn't his in the end.

[13:38] The child isn't his, but he marries Ruth so that Naomi's family will be saved. He gives everything to gain a people of his own so that they will have life in all its fullness.

Do you see here, then, in these pages, as we close the book of Ruth, the shadow of the true redeemer?

A thumbnail image of our very own Lord Jesus Christ. He didn't only risk his investments, but gave up his life to redeem us.

He who sacrificed himself to buy back our lives from death and darkness and sin. He who loved his own loved them to the end.

See, the true redeemer is the one who pays the price. And Christ has done so definitively and definitely in his death.

[14:38] He did it in a legally binding way. For in the courtroom of heaven, his sacrificial death satisfied the justice of God once and for all. So that God, in his grace, can now look at us and declare us sinners righteous.

Righteous in and through his own Son. And Christ didn't pay that price grudgingly, but gladly. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross for the joy of being wed forever to his people. To give us life to the full. To lavish the riches of his kindness upon us throughout all ages. Does this redemption not take your breath away?

To seeing this vision of your redeemer make your heart sing for joy this evening. You were bought with a price, says Paul. But that price that he paid wasn't simply to own us.

It was to redeem us. He didn't buy us in order to use us. His death was not a self-interested sacrifice, but a self-giving sacrifice for us, for our gain.

[15:54] Belonging to Jesus isn't a harsh or oppressive thing. Any more than being married to Boaz was a hardship for Ruth. We gain everything.

We gain everything by belonging to such a redeemer as Jesus Christ. In the ultimate sense, Jesus paid the price to give us our lives back.

Not as they were before. Not if you don't yet know the Lord as they are now. But as they were always meant to be. Life in right relationship with God.

Loving him with our whole being. Reflecting his kindness. His generosity. His love to the world. And the right response of our hearts at this point in the story is simply to be in awe of our redeemer. When the elders and all the people see what Boaz has done, they bless him, don't they? Verse 11. May you have standing. May you be famous. Isn't that just the glory and honor and blessing we would have for our redeemer, Jesus, in our own lives?

[17:06] In our church. In our relationships. Doesn't the thought of the one who has paid the infinitely higher price for our redemption turn our hearts instinctively to him?

In faith and in love. And so, friends, in our hearts at the beginning of a new year, let us set apart Christ the Lord as holy. For if he is your redeemer tonight, he has paid the price to redeem your life in full.

In full and forever. The second thing to grip our hearts about this redemption story this evening. The price of redemption and now the promise of redemption.

The promise of redemption. I read a great line this week that captures a truth about the Bible that I love. And I hope as a church we together are learning to love.

Indeed, it said, no story in the Old Testament really ends. I'd love to hear what you think about that after the service.

[18:12] Something perhaps to chew on in the coming week. No story in the Old Testament really ends. And that's true and perhaps more obvious in Ruth than in many books of the Old Testament.

Because we're left at the end with a big, big bombshell. The ripples, the reverberations of which we don't stop feeling for a thousand years after Ruth and Naomi and Boaz are long gone.

We're given a taste of the power of that bombshell and the blessing that the elders and people at the town gate give to this new family. In verses 11 and 12.

The elders and all the people at the gate said, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who's coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel.

Verse 12. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman. May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, later renamed Israel.

[19:17] They mothered the 12 patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel. One of those men was Judah, who fathered Perez, verse 12, from whose family Boaz himself is a descendant.

And so there could hardly be a more gold-plated comparison for these people to make of Ruth. This poor foreign widow, who at the start of the book was, as Paul would say, separated from Christ.

Alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger to the covenant of promise. Having no hope and being without God in the world. Well, now they pray that she would live up to the legacy of the great mothers of the 12 tribes, who together built up the family of Israel.

They say to Boaz, may this girl you're marrying have their standing, their contribution, their legacy. And may her children have the standing of their fathers, like the family of Perez.

May they be a chip off the old block, we might say. That's underlined again in verse 14, when Boaz and Ruth's son is born, Obed. And the women say of him, as they earlier said of Boaz, didn't they?

[20:33] May he become famous through all Israel. What a thing. What a thing to say of this union. What a thing to say of Ruth.

But what this blessing makes clear is that this small family drama, somewhere in the Middle East, 3,000 years ago, was not happening a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

It's not a footnote in the history books. But it lies at the very epicenter of God's eternal plans and covenant promises.

As a side note, then, if the start of this new year, your life feels too small, or your family too broken, or your faith too fragile, or things just too off the rails for your life to have any real significance to God, any part in his plans, any purpose in his will, think again.

Look at Ruth and think again. If your trust is in this redeeming God, then you are right where you were meant to be, because you are at the very center of his will.

[21:56] And indeed, in time, we see that the people's blessing of Ruth and Boaz and their marriage buds and flowers and bears fruit.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. And this son brings the story of Ruth to a rest, if not to a

close, in two ways.

Firstly, notice who it is who's in the spotlight at the end of this book. Not mum, not baby, not even dad, but mother-in-law Naomi.

And no doubt a scenario that's been replicated in many maternity wards down through the years. But still a surprise, I think. The women say to Naomi, verse 14, Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him.

And the women living there said, Naomi has a son. Naomi has a son. What's going on there? Well, the book started, if you remember, with Naomi grieving over her sons, didn't it?

[23 : 28] And it ends with her cradling a son. And in between, from the terrible heartbreak of chapter one, we've seen how between them, Boaz and Ruth have begun filling up Naomi's emptiness, giving her life in place of death.

And now Naomi's great redemption reaches its climax. Remember those sad words Naomi spoke back in chapter one to Ruth?

Return home, my daughters. Am I going to have any more sons? Who might become your husbands? Chapter four, verse 17, the women say, Naomi has a son.

Legally speaking, Boaz and Ruth had given Naomi an heir to her estate, which is why they call him her son. And he indeed will grow up to be a redeemer to her, one who has got back the family inheritance, one who can root this family back in God's land, back in God's covenant promises.

And in doing so, look, verse 15, he will renew your life, they say, and sustain you in your old age. Literally, he will be a restorer of life to you and a nourisher in your old age.

[24 : 49] He will bring life in place of death, fullness in place of emptiness, a feast in place of famine. And so the story is complete.

And all through the loving kindness of a faithful God who loves, who loves to redeem those who humbly trust in him. Now, that would have been a fine place to end, wouldn't it?

Happily ever after. But even once this drammy drama finishes, the curtain comes down, the writer carries on. If you glance down at your Bibles, verses 17 onwards, a long list of names.

Why are they there? You know, all the loose threads have been tied up. It really is happily ever after for this little family. But no story in the Old Testament ever really ends.

Because in God's sovereign plan behind the scenes, he has been working for a far greater family, a far more lasting redemption that we would ever dare to believe.

[25 : 55] For Boaz's son Obed was, verse 17, the father of Jesse, the father of David. This David would become king and would bring the nation of Israel out from under the darkness of the time of the judges and into the light of God's newly birthed kingdom.

So he would, in a sense, be a redeemer for the nation for a time. But as we read at the start of our service, God's redemption story went further still.

For in time, King David's great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandson, Jesus, would be born. And if we carried on reading in Matthew a few more verses, we'd have found that he was born to save his people from their sins.

He would redeem not a family, not only a nation, but by his blood, he would ransom people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

See, Jesus Christ is Boaz to the power of infinity because out of his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace, kindness upon kindness.

[27 : 11] For by his blood, he has brought us back to God, redeemed our lives from sin fully and finally. Jesus Christ is better than even the best of his ancestors because through him, God's great redemption story comes to each of us.

Whether you've known him for many, many years and need your heart gripped and captivated and consumed again by the great love and kindness that first redeemed you.

Whether perhaps your faith feels shaky and you need to come back to find rest and security again in his unshakable faithfulness and his trustworthy promises.

Whether you've never yet put your trust in him and need this year, even today, to see that he is the only true redeemer for us, the one who alone has paid the price to redeem our lives.

Whoever you are, this redemption story can be your story tonight. It's our story together as Christ's people. It's the story we never stop telling through all our days.

[28 : 26] It's the song that never stops being sung by those gathered around his glorious throne in heaven. A song we will never stop singing through all our days in a new and one day redeemed

cosmos when our redeemer Jesus returns to make all things new.

At the beginning of this new year, let us turn our eyes to Jesus and worship him, our redeemer and king, together. Let's pray together.

God, our Father, how we thank you that you speak to us about our Lord Jesus Christ in ways that we can grasp. Stories, pictures, illustrations.

Lord, these things grip our hearts. Your word grips our hearts. Your powerful word, Lord, shows us Jesus on every page.

He is like a diamond that as we turn him round and round, we never stop seeing the beauty and glory and wonder of his person and his work. And so, our Father, we pray that as we see the price that he has paid, and as we consider your great and very precious promises fulfilled in him, we ask, Lord, only that ye would set our hearts upon him tonight, that you would give him, give us a love for him, Lord, that we often, we confess, lack, that you would give us a faith in him, Lord, that we often struggle to maintain, Lord, that you would renew us in him.

[30 : 20] And, Lord, perhaps for those who don't as yet know him, we ask only that you would bring them to him in your grace and power and by your Holy Spirit, that he is worthy of all our praise, adoration, and faith, for he is faithful to the very end.

We praise you in his great name. Amen.