

# The Faith of the Redeemed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Well, this morning we are picking up the thread again of the book of Ruth. And over the last couple of weeks, I hope that we've seen that the golden thread, if you like, that runs from the beginning to the end of this book is the promise of a Redeemer. If you remember, we met a family with a big problem. There is no one to carry on the family. No father, no husband. And so back then, for the last women standing, for Naomi and Ruth, well, there's no way for them to root their family back in God's promises. On top of their grief over the death, the loss of their loved ones, they'd lost their place in God's land. They'd lost their people among God's community, but they had not lost God himself. We saw these women living on the breadline, turned and trusted in who God promises to be to those who cling to him. And last week, we saw that they have found God to be as good as his word. They came home hungry, but they are being filled again. They left in a famine, but they have come back to a feast. And so from under the shadow of death, these women are being given new life. All because they have begun to taste the faithful love of their promise-keeping God.

And we saw that that comes to them in the overflowing kindness of a redeemer, a relative of theirs named Boaz. And so where we left Naomi and Ruth last week, it's as if they've had an appetizer that has made them realize just how hungry they really were. They've tasted something that has left them wanting more. And so at the beginning of chapter three, we find them hoping in a redeemer. And in this chapter, we get to see the kind of trust or the kind of faith that these women put in the redeemer, which is really helpful for us as we trust or as we learn to trust in the redeemer.

Because as the readers of this book, when it was first written new, this wee redemption story is like a bubbling brick that flows into an even bigger stream of redemption in the coming of a king, in the coming of David. The writer leaves us with that thought at the end of chapter four.

But the New Testament takes us further and teaches us that that stream, that river of redemption, has now flowed into an ocean of redemption in the coming of Jesus Christ, God's forever king.

[ 2 : 55 ] And so it shouldn't surprise us then that the faith that Naomi and Ruth put in their mini redeemer, Boaz, is just the same kind of faith that we today can put in our great redeemer, Jesus.

And so we're going to glimpse as we go through, not three, but six things about faith that help us keep trusting at the Lord Jesus. Okay, this is a two-for-one sermon, but I promise that it won't be twice as long. Firstly, then, we see faith in the redeemer is intentional.

From the depths of despair, Boaz's kindness has given Naomi fresh hope, so she comes up with a very risky plan. Now, Naomi wants the best for Ruth, doesn't she? Verse one, I must find a home for you, she says, where you, Ruth, will be well provided for.

But there's much more at stake here than a cozy home, because, let's not forget, verse two, that the man in question is also a relative of ours. Now, we would think that that would rule Boaz out of any wedding plans, but back then, under God's law, remember, being Boaz a relative, he had a responsibility to this family to redeem them from death. The way it worked, he would marry into the family and produce children in the family name to carry the line forward. So, Boaz isn't just a potential husband for Ruth, but a possible rescuer for Naomi's whole family. That's why there's so much resting on her outrageous plan. And now, I said last week that the book of Ruth is not a rom-com.

This week, we see that neither is a dating handbook, because who on earth would tell a faithful young woman to do this? Verse three, wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes.

[ 5 : 04 ] Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you're there until he's finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he's lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down.

What kind of plan is this? Basically, Ruth is getting dressed up as a bride for her wedding day, and going at night to secretly crawl under the covers with a man with a couple of drinks in him. Okay, this is a risky plan. If Ruth was caught, her name would be ruined. If she succeeded, well, who knows what might happen? Okay, this is not the good book guide to dating. If you are looking for a faithful partner, okay, this is not the way to do it. Don't try this at home, is the message. Okay, but back then in Israel, if you were in search of a redeemer, and you were convinced of how infinitely good and kind and faithful that redeemer is, well, then this is a plan and a half. And faithful Ruth signs up to it, doesn't she? See, these women's faith is not resting on the chemistry of a relationship, but rather in God's promise that he would give a redeemer. And in the proven character and worth of that redeemer, of the one who embodies that promise, that we might say the word made flesh.

And so in faith, they make a cunning plan. Now they've seen the redeemer, they know who he is. They don't wait for him to come to them. They can't do that. They very deliberately reach out to him, trusting in who they know he is. True faith, we see, is intentional. And trusting in our redeemer, Jesus is no different. God shows us who Jesus really is, but there's a response needed.

[7:11] God gives us faith as a gift, but we have to use that faith. God gives us spiritual muscles, so to speak, but we actually have to do the reaching out. We need God's help even to trust Jesus, but we don't trust him passively. If you've trusted Jesus for a long while, you know the difference.

You know those seasons where faith has grown lazy, those God-given spiritual muscles haven't been stretched in a while. But when we do reach out, when we hunger again for his word, when we thirst for him in prayer, when we deliberately go and find him where he promises to meet us, well, our faith is renewed.

Our spirit is strengthened. Faith is our human response to who we know Christ is. And so if you're not yet a Christian, if you've not yet put your trust in him, what is it that's stopping you from reaching out to him? It might seem like a far too bold or risky or outrageous thing to put your trust in Christ. But when we see that he is the good and gracious and promised redeemer for us, well, deciding, making up your mind to put your trust in him is always the right response to him. True faith is intentional. But secondly, true faith we see is also intimate.

Faithful Ruth did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. And so we read verse 7, when Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. You know, I can't think of it a more intimate scene than this in the Bible, outside perhaps of the Song of Songs.

In the secrecy of darkness, a young woman, dressed up for date night, tiptoes over, uncovers a man's legs, and lies down next to him. Okay, this definitely isn't an 18, but it is at least a 12. Okay, nothing happens, but there's definite tension, isn't there? And it's all to make us feel how vulnerable Ruth is. Her whole life now rests in the hands of this man, Boaz. When he wakes up, how he reacts will either make or break her. Hours pass. And then, verse 8, in the middle of the night, something startled the man. He turned, and there was a woman at his feet.

[10:02] You can imagine Boaz, bleary-eyed, doing a double-take. His surprise is comical.

Presumably, Ruth hadn't slept, her heart racing. But now they're both awake, and they are just the man, the woman, alone, in the night. See, Ruth's faith brings her to her Redeemer alone. She is one-on-one with the one who could redeem or destroy her life. That makes her incredibly vulnerable, but that is what real faith does. See, trusting in Jesus to redeem you is something that you have to do personally. Yes, we belong to a church, we become part of a church, but faith has to be between me and him before it's between us and him. In the words of Robert Murray McShane, what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more. So, if you have never come to him yourself, let me say, no one can bring you. The church can't bring you. I can't bring you. You have to walk towards him, yourself. And when we do, the promise is that we will find an intimacy like no other, in the way that we need time alone with a friend, with a husband, with a wife, to renew our love, our affection, our trust. Well, we have the privilege of coming to our Creator, alone, to speak with him, to hear from him, to enjoy him. There's something vulnerable about that too, isn't there? He sees our faults. He knows our sins. Perhaps today that's actually what holds you back from coming to him. But we take hold of the goodness and the promise of our Redeemer, Jesus, that his forgiveness clears us of guilt, takes away our shame. And so, we come to him not needing to be afraid. Don't be afraid, he says. True faith is intentional, it's intimate, and thirdly, my alliteration failed. It's grounded in covenant promise. Again, see why Ruth is really there.

His night vision now clearing up, Boaz asks, who are you? To which Ruth replies, verse 9, I am your servant, Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian redeemer of our family. Even in our progressive age, it's unusual, isn't it, for a woman to pop the question to a man, but that's just what Ruth is doing. Marry me, she says. Spread the corner of your cloak over me. And cleverly, she's actually quoting back to Boaz words that he had said to her right at the beginning of the season in the fields. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, he said, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. Now, Ruth is calling in that blessing as she asks Boaz, in the original Hebrew, to spread his wings over her. God promises to be a refuge, a safe stronghold to those who come under his loving care, to give rest and security.

Ruth is taking God at his word. She's come under his wings. But we've seen that all God's kindness is channeled towards her through this man, Boaz. And so it's fitting, now Ruth has seen this, that she comes to ask Boaz to give her what God has promised her. Spread your wings over me.

Become my refuge, my safe place, my security. Give me a home. Give me rest. Because I trust in God's covenant promise that he will do that for me when I cling to his words. See, Ruth isn't just looking for any man to marry. She's not been swept off her feet. She's not acting on an emotional impulse.

She's reaching out in faith to the guardian redeemer of our family. God had promised. He promised in his covenant to provide a redeemer, and here he is. And so Ruth, Ruth takes hold with both hands of God's word and comes to her redeemer and asks him to fulfill that promise. In the same way we can wrongly think that Ruth is acting on her feelings, so we can wrongly think that faith in Jesus comes down to a feeling or an impulse.

[14:54] Our society today would say that faith is a subjective thing. You know, if you feel that's right, that's fine, but I don't feel it, and you can't tell me differently. And sometimes even as Christians, even as churches, we've swallowed that hole. Perhaps you came to Jesus and trusted in him, but you didn't feel any different. And so you wondered, or perhaps you still wonder, whether he really belongs to you at all. But friends, real faith doesn't work on feelings. It works on words.

God has given his word that whoever comes to Jesus, he will never turn away. Come to me, says Jesus, and I will give you rest. Whoever comes to me, he says, I will never cast out.

And true faith is saying to Jesus, like Ruth says to Boaz, you promised. You promised to be a redeemer to me. So now do what you promised. When we say that to Jesus, we find he is always as good as his word.

Because fourthly, we see that faith is effective. What will Boaz say now that he's found his bearings in the dark? The Lord bless you, my daughter, he replied. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You've not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all that you ask. He said yes. Boaz cannot stop blessing Ruth in this book. And for the same reason that he blessed her before, for her kindness, her hesed, her covenant faithful love. So he blesses her again. He'd heard of Ruth's kindness to Naomi, but now her kindness goes further still. Now, up to this week, I'd always understood Boaz's words as if he was speaking about Ruth being kind to him. She's passed over all the younger men and chosen instead an older man, Boaz. But I was helped by Christopher Ashe in a book of his to see that actually Boaz is still talking about Ruth's kindness to Naomi. Partly because Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law is always what Boaz has admired in Ruth. That's what he likes about her. Partly because Boaz isn't the recipient of kindness in this book, but the channel through which God's kindness flows. But mainly because the biggest winner of Ruth's marriage to Boaz is Naomi.

See, it's implied that Ruth has had proposals from men her own age, some rich, some poor. And if Ruth had accepted any of them, well, she would have had a home. She would have had a family.

[18:00] She might have had a big bank account. That's what Naomi wants for her daughter. But Naomi would still have had nothing because Naomi and her family can only be redeemed if Ruth marries and has a family with a guardian redeemer, a relative of theirs. And so Ruth's proposal to Boaz shows off her kindness, not to Boaz, but to Naomi. And in light of Ruth's faithfulness and devotion, Boaz says, I'll do it. Imagine Ruth's relief after the long sleepless hours of the night, wondering what Boaz would say or do or think of her when he woke up. And then he says these words, don't be afraid.

I will do for you all that you ask. See, true faith is effective, which is a way of saying that when we trust Jesus' promise to be a redeemer to us, he becomes our redeemer. Don't be afraid, he says.

I will. Early in our service, we read, didn't we, about a woman who came to Jesus knowing that she was unworthy, knowing that she was a sinner, but she looked to him, came to him as her redeemer. Others looked down on her. What is she doing here? Don't you know what this woman is like, Jesus?

Jesus did not hesitate, did he? Your faith has saved you, he said. Go in peace. Faith in Jesus works.

He is willing. He is able to redeem any who come to him, trusting in his promise to do so. And that goes for any of us. But next we hit a crisis, because despite Ruth's single-minded faith in Boaz, there are other redeemers, it turns out, who might step in at the last minute.

[ 20 : 03 ] Fifthly, then, we see true faith is exclusive. Because, says Boaz, although it's true that I am a guardian redeemer of your family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

Dun, dun, dun. This is as close to a crisis as we get in this book. Ruth has gone looking for a redeemer, but at the last minute, Boaz might not be it. I guess the more closely related redeemer would have legally had the first right to refuse. So, could it end happily ever after, but without Boaz in the picture after all? Well, we know it can't. Our gut says that would be a bad ending. It has to be Boaz. He has not stopped showing kindness to the living or the dead. He is the true and right redeemer for these women and no one else. There are other redeemers around, but we know they cannot save. And without giving the ending away, it turns out in the end that this other guy, whatever claim he might have had, turns out to be a lousy rescuer. He fancies it at first, but he's not willing to take it all the way. But Boaz isn't willing to let Ruth go.

Stay here, he says, for the night. In the morning, if he wants to do his duty as your guardian redeemer, good, let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it. His words maybe sound a bit like a safety net. You know, if that doesn't work out, I'll still be here waiting for you. But as we'll see in a few weeks, Boaz is set. He is determined to redeem these women.

And he won't give his place to any other redeemer. So there's an exclusivity in Boaz's love for Ruth that goes hand in hand with Ruth's giving up other potential lovers for Boaz. There's no room for a third wheel, so to speak, in this relationship. And faith in Jesus is exclusive in the same way.

[ 22 : 23 ] He won't tolerate any rival. He won't put up with other interested suitors. He won't share his bride. And so when we come and trust in Jesus, he demands our whole and undivided trust.

He's not a safety net for us. He's not plan B. He's not the fallback option when other things go wrong in our lives. We've seen how he's perfectly willing and able to redeem us fully when we come to him. So we don't need a plan B. And we know that all other claims for our faith are ultimately fickle and empty. And do you let us down and don't go all the way? But how prone our hearts are to wandering?

How prone are we to leave the God we love? Jesus' love for us is exclusive. It's all-consuming love. And so he calls us back again and again to trust in him exclusively. And he hears what he has done.

There is truly none like him. And for he is willing and able to save to the uttermost all the way those who draw near to God through him. But sickly and finally, our faith in Jesus is expectant faith. After the biggest night of her life, Boaz sends Ruth home in the morning once again laden with food. Come here, he says. Boaz gets Ruth to hold out her scarf. And Boaz heaps grain into it to take back to Naomi. Naomi is just boiling the kettle when Ruth staggers through the door. Well, she asks, how did it go? And in answer, Ruth shows her mother-in-law not an engagement ring, but as good as a massive heap of grain. And she told her everything that Boaz had done for her.

[ 24 : 32 ] We often speak of faith in Jesus as being now but not yet. And that's just the position that these women find themselves in as they reach out to the Redeemer. They're being filled, aren't they, with good things, with hope, with love, with joy again after their past bitterness and emptiness, the darkness and death that they've come from. And in a way that Boaz perhaps didn't realize when he said these words, verse 17 is a direct answer to Naomi's complaint back in chapter one.

And I went away full, she said. But the Lord has brought me back empty. But now there is a Redeemer in their lives. And he says, don't go back empty-handed. It's a wonderful turnaround. You could see the transformation in their lives. And yet the best is yet to come.

The best is yet to come. Because Boaz is on the move. The promised Redeemer is going as we speak to settle the matter, to tie up the loose ends, to bring his family home at last. The harvest is finishing. The age is coming to an end. But he will not rest until the matter is settled.

So, says Naomi, wait. Wait. Some of what you hoped for is now. But some of what you're hoping for is still to come. And brothers and sisters, that is where we are right now, isn't it? If we have trusted in Jesus, our Redeemer, he fills our lives with loving kindness and good gifts. We have the first fruits of his blessing, the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. He's given us new life. He's given us a new family. He's given us himself. But one day he will come again to settle the matter once and for all. In Christ, we are a new creation. But he is coming again to make all things new. And then we will be home. With the family of faith gone before us, with our faithful God, with our great Redeemer, Jesus.

[ 26 : 54 ] And so, like Ruth, we wait for him. I didn't plan to leave you on such a cliffhanger. But in the Lord's providence, and if the Lord wills, we'll have to wait. And God willing, we'll see what happens early next year. But for now, let Ruth and the Holy Spirit help us and give us strength as we trust in our Lord Jesus and wait for him together. Let's pray.

God, our Father, how we thank you that you are faithful to all your promises. And we thank you that you have fulfilled your promises, not in an impersonal, cold and distant way, but personally, that you have sent Jesus our Savior as the fulfillment, the yes to your every promise.

Lord, we thank you for him, for his coming, that he is indeed a perfect Redeemer for us. We thank you that he fills us and gives us life.

And we pray, Lord, that you would give us thankful hearts every day, Lord, for who he is and all that he has done for us. We pray, Lord, that you would help us too to wait for him.

Lord, we find this hard and pray that by your Spirit, you would keep drawing us to him each and every day. We thank you, Father, that he will never let us go.

[ 28 : 25 ] And so we pray that you would bid us come. For we ask in his great name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.